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회귀자

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회사 귀환

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“Alone?”

“Yes.”

“So… you came alone?”

“Yes, that’s what I said.”

“Yes…”

Struggling to understand what was happening, Hwang Jongi looked back at the entire situation.

Repeating the same words and the same questions in his mind. He awkwardly makes eye contact with his subordinate.

‘Didn’t he say that just now?’

And then nodded with a slightly awkward face; it seemed like the child did come alone.

Hwang Jongi turned his head and looked at the child in front of him.

He had all sorts of thoughts racing through his mind.

Was Mount Hua looking down on the Eunha Merchants?

Or was there a reason they sent this child? If not…

“*Hahaha!* ”

At that moment, a peal of loud laughter was heard approaching from behind.

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“How ridiculous! Young master, didn’t I tell you? There is no need to meet with Mount Hua!”

Ki Mok-Seung.

He had followed Hwang Jongi to the front gate and continued to speak while struggling to stifle his laughter.

“What were they thinking by sending a little boy for help? They knew nothing but wanted to make use of this opportunity. They were too embarrassed to come in person, so they sent a child instead. Such petty tricks!”

Hwang Jongi's face hardened.

It was obvious that Ki Mok-Seung disliked Mount Hua just from his words, but now Hwang Jongi was beginning to think the same.

'Is Elder Hyun Jong of Mount Hua a man who would do such a thing?'

The Hyun Jong that he knew was always a gentleman, despite being in trouble. It was unlikely for that man to send in a child alone.

But was this a new reality?

"Young man. Did you really come here alone?"

"Yes."

"…you mean that Mount Hua has sent you, a young Taoist, alone?"

Young Taoist?

Chung Myung sighed deeply.

'To be treated like this, because of this young body.'

There was a time when Chung Myung was Mount Hua, and Mount Hua was Chung Myung.

' *Eh*. I'd rather die than suffer like this.'

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But he could understand the reaction. A child, who isn't even a physician, comes and says they'll cure diseases that the best doctors in the world failed to treat.

So, he controlled himself.

“Young master?”

“Y-yes.”

“My name is Chung Myung, a third-class disciple of Mount Hua. I received the letter the young master sent to Mount Hua. I have a clue about the symptoms which were written in the letter, so I came to visit.”

“All alone…”

“It was an urgent matter, so I couldn’t wait for the others to come. Isn’t the elderly in critical condition?”

That was true…

Hwang Jongi, who stared at Chung Myung, couldn’t bring himself to trust that face.

But he recalled a part of Chung Myung’s words and hardened his face.

“You said you have a clue about my father’s condition?”

“Yes. That’s right.”

Hwang Jongi clenched his fist.

‘This is the first time someone said it outright!’

So far, so many people had come, but not one person had an idea of what was happening.

‘Maybe?’

At that moment, he heard a snort from behind.

“*Huh.* That young child is already misleading you. How can a child know something that the great masters of the world don’t? Young master! You can’t listen to him any

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longer.”

“But…”

“Young master, do you believe that little brat?”

Hwang Jongi bit his lip.

At that moment, Chung Myung, who was listening, spoke out.

“By the way.”

“*Huh?* ”

“Who the hell are you? To keep referring to me as a brat?”

Ki Mok-Seung looked at Chung Myung with blank eyes.

“Are you asking me?”

“Is there anyone other than you who used the word brat?”

“Huh. You arrogant brat! Does this mean that the disciples of Mount Hua can’t even recognize the uniform of the Southern Edge Sect? I know that Mount Hua isn’t doing great, but I didn’t think they would be taking in such idiotic disciples.”

“*Ah*. Southern Edge Sect.”

Chung Myung just shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, you were speaking as if you knew what you were talking about, so I thought you were a physician. So, do you have a cure for Elder Hwang’s condition?”

“Elder Hwang has fallen ill because he went against the Dao. If we can perform the Taoist Ritual to relieve the anger of heaven, he will be healed cleanly.”

Chung Myung smiled at it.

“*Oh*. That could be true.”

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Hwang Jongi’s face contorted at it.

But the words which flowed from Chung Myung’s mouth were completely different from Hwang Jongi’s expectations.

“Then we need to hurry up and call for the Wudang sect or the Kunlun sect.”

“…what?”

“Isn’t this ritual thing what they specialize in?”

Ki Mok-Seung frowned as he spoke with a slightly flustered face.

“T-there is no need to go that far. Isn’t the Southern Edge Sect right here?”

“*Ehh*. Everyone knows that both the Southern Edge and Mount Hua Sects aren’t good with rituals. If you are going to do a ritual, it would be better to get a proper expert.

If it was me, I would prefer the Wudang sect.”

“…”

Hwang Jongi’s face darkened.

‘Who is this child?’

The child then whispered to Hwang Jongi.

“The Wudang sect tends to value trust, so donate a little and they will come to you right away. If you want to do something, then aim for the best quality. From a good place. A place that’s cost-effective too.”

“…”

Ki Mok-Seung let out a furious bellow from his anger-flushed face.

“Shut up! This brat is constantly making fun of adults! Did your elders teach you this?”

“*Ah*, yes, yes. Sorry.”

Chung Myung calmly picked his ears.

It was blatantly disregarding Ki Mok-Seung, but the man could do nothing but tremble in anger.

If he was the elder and he couldn’t even bear the anger and lashed out, then it would be a disgrace for the Southern Edge Sect. Wouldn’t that be enough for the people of the world to point their fingers at them?

No one could tell if the child was doing this intentionally, but he was adept at pulling on every nerve.

“Young master. Kick this brat out right now!”

Hwang Jongi sighed at those words.

“Elder. This is the Eunha Merchant Guild. Not the Southern Edge sect. it is up to me to decide how I will treat my guests.”

“Are you still saying that after seeing how this child acts?”

Hwang Jongi ignored Ki Mok-Seung and looked at Chung Myung.

‘I want to believe him.’

If he came here to cheat them, then the child wouldn’t be acting so proudly. But there was a bit of suspicion.

“Young Taoist.”

“Yes.”

“I am not saying this because I don’t believe you…”

“It is fine. You can’t simply believe someone outright.”

“…thank you for understanding. May I ask a few questions?”

Hwang Jongi asked right away. Chung Myung also felt that it was understandable for the other man to be suspicious.

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“Yes, by all means.”

Hwang Jongi gulped and continued.

“Young man. You said a while ago that you had some clue about my father’s condition, can I hear a little bit about it?”

“It will be a bit hard to say.”

“*hehe!* ”

Afraid that Chung Myung would say something, Ki Mok-Seung snorted. Hwang Jongi felt embarrassed at the absurdity.

“Instead, can I ask something?”

“What is it?”

Chung Myung asked.

“I heard that Elder Hwang often traveled for the sake of business, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then, he must have stopped by the Qilian Mountains before growing ill. Right?”

Chung Myung spoke brimming with confidence.

Hwang Jongi was taken aback, his eyes opened wide, as he looked at Chung Myung and said.

“No, he didn’t.”

“…”

Chung Myung tilted his head slightly.

“*Huh?* ”

“That never happened. Father had never gone up those mountains.”

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“…Ah, is that so?”

Chung Myung seemed flustered, and Hwang Jongi’s expression began to turn gloomy, so Chung Myung hastily said,

“Then, he must have been attacked in the upper parts of the Mountains before, right?

Did he experience a crisis of some sort?”

“My father hasn’t been attacked at all in recent years. At least, not for five years.”

“*Uh?* Not that too? Ah, shit, then what?”

“…”

Hwang Jongi narrowed his eyes.

“Really? That can’t be right.”

Hwang Jongi could hear Ki Mok-Seung laughing from behind.

“That’s strange. Where did he get beat up?”

Beat up? This crazy bastard!

Was this child even in his right mind?

It was at the moment the hope Hwang Jongi saw in Chung Myung disappeared, Hwang Jongi’s eyes turned cold.

Chung Myung spoke in a panic.

“W-wait! Is that true? Well, I can still fix him.”

“…Young Taoist.”

Hwang Jongi sighed, and without missing the moment, Ki Mok-Seung came in.

“Didn’t I say that they were nothing now? Mount Hua was always made of rookies who liked to dazzle the others’ eyes. Isn’t that something you can see from this one’s overconfident form?”

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“Please refrain from speaking like that, elder.”

Hwang Jongi dissuaded Ki Mok-Seung and spoke to Chung Myung.

“I understand the will of the young Taoist to come and help, but my father is very ill right now, and I don’t have the time for this. I hope you can understand my current position too—”

“His entire body turns red as if he’s boiling but his body shivers as though it’s cold.

When you press his skin with your finger or hand, the pressed part turns white and then quickly turns red again. Until he lost consciousness, he complained about the cold as if he was in a frozen cave because of the uncontrollable chills! Furthermore, the black spots are not only the glabella, but also the back of neck and crown of his head.”

“…”

“Should I say more?”

Chung Myung smirked.

“H-How did you know?”

Hwang Jongi’s eyes widened. The face and form of Chung Myung were so confident that he couldn’t doubt him anymore.

“Ah… I came from a long way; I am a little thirsty.”

“What are you waiting for! Get water right now! No, get cold water! Right now!”

The subordinate didn’t even answer and ran inside with all his might. Hwang Jongi’s gaze and attitude had changed towards Chung Myung.

“We can’t do this here, please come inside.”

“*Haha*. What a great person has come.”

“Hurry! Please!”

Chung Myung inflated his chest and followed Hwang Jongi inside. Ki Mok-Seung, who

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was watching from the side, exclaimed urgently.

“Young master! Those are typical symptoms of those who suffer from harmful qi!

Knowing that doesn’t change anything!”

Hwang Jongi narrowed his eyes.

“Are you saying that a black qi gathers on the crown and back of the neck of those who have been affected by harmful qi flow?”

“…that.”

“This is a matter of the Eunha Merchant Guild. We will not tolerate any more interference than necessary. If you interfere one more time, I will personally have to take this up to the Southern Edge Sect.”

“*Uhm.* ”

Ki Mok-Seung sighed and took a step back.

His eyes looked at the child; Chung Myung had puffed up cheeks, clearly trying to hold back his laughter.

“Y-You… brat!”

Ki Mok-Seung felt heat rising all over his body. He wanted to tear the child apart, but what could he do? As Hwang Jongi said, this wasn’t the Southern Edge sect but the Eunha Guild. No matter how much of an elder he was, he couldn’t act arrogantly here.

“You brat! If you cannot treat Elder Hwang properly, I will personally strike you down!”

All he could do was shove Chung Myung and walk away furiously.

After a little while, Hwang Jongi spoke with a bitter smile.

“I am sorry. Young Taoist. Strangely whenever Mount Hua comes up, the Southern Edge Sect seems to lose all reason.”

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“It’s fine.”

“*Ah*- please understand…”

“Who’s to blame? It was all my sins to begin with.”

“… *huh?* ”

Chung Myung shrugged.

‘Maybe I shouldn’t have beaten them so much?’

At this moment, the perpetrator from a hundred years ago sympathized with the victims a hundred years later.

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“No… that—”

“What is it?”

“You see, there’s a proper order to these things.”

“Isn’t this the most urgent matter?”

“I’ve come from so far away, and I’m hungry.”

“When the treatment is done, I will prepare a feast.”

“…I have no power to move.”

“You can sit.”

Chung Myung glanced at Hwang Jongi. His eyes were burning.

Hwang Jongi finally caught hold of a rope while he was drowning, and that rope was Chung Myung. If he couldn’t fix elder Hwang, he

wasn’t going to let Chung Myung go.

Chung Myung lost his appetite.

“Then, let’s go and see—”

“Hurry!”

“…okay, okay! Don’t rush me.”

Chung Myung turned his head and looked at the bed. Lying on the bed was a man covered in a thick silk blanket.

“Well.”

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Checking the man’s face, Chung Myung narrowed his eyes as his forehead creased.

‘It certainly is the symptoms of the demon flower.’

He would have to take a closer look to be sure. Chung Myung moved closer and removed the blanket.

Seeing the scene before him, he frowned subconsciously.

Hwang Mun-Yak’s withered and skinny appearance couldn’t be hidden despite the loose clothing on his body.

The old man’s throat had dried up, as each ragged breath he took seemed to walk a tightrope between life and death.

‘The situation is more serious than I thought.’

Chung Myung rubbed his chin.

‘The demon flower is one thing, but this wasn’t done properly.’

If he had been subjected to a highly trained demonic art, then he wouldn’t have lasted a year. Even those who rigorously trained all their lives would be unable to survive for three days.

These are not symptoms an elderly man could endure.

Then…

“I’m going to check his pulse.”

“Yes.”

Chung Myung reached out and grabbed elder Hwang’s wrist.

He then inserted a little bit of qi. As Chung Myung’s pure qi left his body and entered elder Hwang through his wrist, the blackened veins and red tint on his skin began to retreat.

‘This.’

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Chung Myung frowned.

The symptoms were clearly that of the demon flower. However, they were awkward symptoms that would never come from properly trained Demonic sect members.

Chung Myung released the old man’s hand and touched his chin as if he was in trouble.

Hwang Jongi couldn’t hide his nervousness as he saw Chung Myung’s strained expression looking like that. Anyone would struggle

to remain calm if their last hope showed such a serious reaction when examining a patient.

Finally, unable to bear it, Hwang Jongi opened his mouth.

“…how is it?”

“Eh, so…”

Chung Myung scratched the back of his head.

“Is it tough?”

“No. I don’t think that treating it would be difficult.”

“Right. It is fine. Everyone has be—huh?”

Hwang Jongi’s body trembled.

“What was that…?”

“Treating this shouldn’t be too difficult.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“Yes. But I can’t rush into it right away. Some preparations will need to be done.”

“Preparation like…”

“First of all!”

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Chung Myung had a sly smile.

“Let’s eat.”

“…”

Crunch! Munch!

Chung Myung was cutting and chewing everything around him to shreds. Hwang Jongi was aghast at the absurd sight unfolding before him.

He had met many Taoists in his life while building relationships with others, but this was the first time he had seen a Taoist so obsessed with eating meat.

Even now, the long-torn leg of the duck which entered Chung Myung’s mouth re-emerged as a desiccated bone robbed of all its flesh.

Not just that.

Gulp! Gulp!

As soon as the glass was filled, expensive Yeontae liquor disappeared down his throat.

“*Kuaaah! Euu!* This is it! This is life!”

“…”

It was the first time Chung Myung had tasted such delicious alcohol.

Hwang Jongi would have normally laughed, saying that he’d met an interesting person today, but the current situation kept him from enjoying himself.

“That… young Taoist?”

“*Eh?* What?”

Chung Myung asked with meat filling his mouth, Hwang Jongi, taking a deep breath to calm himself, continued.

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“The preparations… when will they be done?”

“I’m preparing now.”

“What do you mean?”

“*Ah*, nothing serious.”

Chung Myung put down his chopsticks.

“The treatment requires a lot of stamina, so it is important to be well fed. Plus, the chef here is really great.”

Obviously, he is.

Because the chef was the best in Xian.

“I only got to eat small meals and rice in Mount Hua; this is so good.”

Chung Myung patted his stomach.

“Are you done?”

“No. This is just the beginning.”

“…”

Was there a tapeworm in his stomach?

It was said that Mount Hua was going through difficult times, but this one seemed too hungry… no, even if he was starving, wouldn’t his

stomach get full after a while?

Surely, there must be a limit to what a human's stomach can hold?

This was a Taoist who surprised people in many ways.

"You didn't come here just to eat, right?"

"What are you saying?"

"Well, Taoists are people who move with a purpose."

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"Those who cultivate the way of Dao live according to the flow."

"Well, the flow here is too fast…"

"This is a moderated flow."

What?

Hwang Jongi sighed, knowing he couldn't win over this child.

"Young man. I understand that it's rude to rush you when you are here to help us, especially after a long journey. But shouldn't you also consider the feelings of a son whose father has been bedridden for over a year?"

"I am already considering it."

Hwang Jongi jumped out of his seat!

"Look here! Young one! My father—!"

"Isn't dying."

“—what did you say?”

“He isn’t dying. So, sit down.”

Chung Myung casually poured another glass of alcohol and drank it down.

Seeing Hwang Jongi’s angry and confused expression, Chung Myung decided to speak.

“I’ve already taken some measures to ensure he won’t die, so there’s no problem. It will take some time to cure him completely, but we’ve already overcome the first important hurdle.”

He’s been treated?

When?

“There is a saying that the faster we move ahead, the more we need to think back.

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Healing your father now is not that important. What’s really important is to understand why he fell ill in the first place.”

“…you really treated him?”

“Did you think I was scamming you?”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders and continued.

“If you have any doubts, go and check. I’m sure the dark qi on his forehead will have dissipated by now.”

Hwang Jongi stared intently at Chung Myung and nodded his head.

“I do not doubt you. However, I think it’s good to be certain, so I will check right away.”

“Please.”

Hwang Jongi quickly went outside. A short while later, he burst through the door, slamming it open as he stared at Chung Myung with incredulous eyes.

“W-what did you do?”

“I treated him.”

“When?”

Chung Myung didn’t reply and casually pointed to the seat opposite him.

“Aren’t you going to sit?”

“…”

Hwang Jongi looked at Chung Myung suspiciously.

While living as a merchant, he’d met an uncountable number of people, but this was his first time meeting such a person.

He’d met many children, but this child seemed more like a seasoned old man.

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‘As if an old man’s soul resided within a child’s body.’

That’s impossible. Instead, this child must have experienced countless events unsuited for his age. Otherwise, it was unlikely for a

child to handle such situations with ease.

‘Can I trust him?’

But there is no reason to not believe. As he confirmed, his father did show signs of recovery.

Whether or not he knew what Hwang Jongi was thinking, Chung Myung continued to pour another glass of liquor and spoke.

“If you don’t want to sit, then stand and answer. I have a few questions for you…”

Hwang Jongi sat down.

“Who is the person closest to your father?”

“Closest?”

“Yes. A person who guards Elder Hwang. A person who follows him dawn till dusk.

Otherwise, someone well trusted, the last person to be suspected of anything untoward.”

“…why are you asking that?”

“Let’s just say that it’ll be necessary for the treatment.”

Hwang Jongi tilted his head.

“Of course, it is me. It is my job to serve my father.”

“Except you.”

“Except me…”

Hwang Jongi, who thought deeply, shook his head.

“I don’t know. Father was a man who worked a lot. So, of course, several people were around him or looked after him. There are at least five people who meet your standards and often stay around him.”

“A lot more than I thought. *Hmm*.”

Chung Myung scratched his cheek.

But then shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“If there are five of them, finding out which one it is won’t be easy.”

“Find out what?”

“Are you really asking because you can’t understand? *Eh.* No, right?”

“…”

Hwang Jongi’s face went stiff. He didn’t ask because he was unaware of the truth. It was because he didn’t want to admit it.

“You mean, someone did this from inside?”

“At first, I thought that it was from outside, but looking at Elder Hwang, I don’t think that was the case. From my point of view, this was a betrayal from the inside.”

Hwang Jongi’s face went stiff.

“Please refrain from such words, Young Taoist! All members of the Eunha Merchants are like family! They have been together with us their entire lives, and they all respect my father! They—”

“Or not.”

“— *Uh?* ”

Chung Myung patted his full stomach.

“If we suspect them and they’re truly innocent, then it’ll all be fine anyway, right?”

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“…that is true.”

Chung Myung yawned.

“So don’t worry. We will investigate and find out.”

Hwang Jongi just nodded his head.

Seeing that, Chung Myung clicked his tongue and thought.

‘He is pretty naï ve for a merchant.’

Chung Myung knew just how poisonous humans can be.

He’d seen monks who preached mercy give into a rage and go mad and watched innocent Taoists plot the most efficient way to slit a person’s throat.

Human beings are two-sided.

You can be an angel to someone and the devil to another.

‘Well, that’s beside the point.’

The important thing was that a person wanted to kill Hwang Mun-Yak.

Judging from his condition, the culprit clearly has poor comprehension of the Demon Sect's technique. The problem was that, even though it couldn't do much damage to Hwang Mun-Yak at first, over time and prolonged exposure, he became gravely afflicted.

Even if someone had knowledge of the demon flower, they wouldn't be able to tell how the symptoms originated unless they had seen it with their own eyes, like Chung Myung.

'The culprit must be well hidden.'

Luck was on his side.

If Chung Myung had never seen the contents of that letter… no, if he hadn't even heard of this Elder Hwang earlier that day, then Hwang Mun-Yak would have been

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destined to die.

' *Kua.* This is a good deed.'

Save people and make money.

"How do you plan on investigating?"

"I am already doing it."

"… *Hm?* "

Hwang Jongi asked with a blank face.

“You are doing it?”

“Yes.”

“You’re eating food, but you say you are investigating?”

“*Ah*. Not that. The fact that I am in a room with the young master is enough for the investigation.”

Hwang Jongi couldn’t figure it out.

“Just watch. Soon a lot of fun things will happen. Young master, be sure to keep your eyes open. *Ah*, there is one more thing you need to do.”

“What is it? I’ll try my best.”

Chung Myung picked up the bottle next to him.

“One more bottle.”

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“Quickly.”

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A flood of tears was concealed within Hwang Jongi’s heart.

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“*Hmmm!* ”

Ki Mok-Seung stared at the food in front of him with an agitated expression.

Holding his chopsticks, he eventually set them down, unable to eat.

The disciples who were there stole furtive glances at him.

“Is the food not to your liking?”

“*Hmm.* ”

“It isn’t that the food is poor; I just don’t feel well.”

“You don’t feel well? If the disciples have done anything wrong, please punish us.”

“It isn’t your fault.”

Ki Mok-Seung gently pushed the table away with an irritated face.

“There’s a man I never wanted to see, and someone sharing the same name as him is currently running around.”

The second-class disciple, Lee Song-Baek, asked.

“Are you talking about the Mount Hua disciple?”

“*Khum!* ”

Ki Mok-Seung didn’t answer, but everyone knew what this uncomfortable cough meant.

“Elder. I don’t quite understand. What could one small child even do…?”

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“Whether or not he’s a child isn’t the problem.”

“Then…”

“It’s a problem that he is a child from Mount Hua.”

The disciples didn’t seem to understand.

What did it mean that a child from Mount Hua is the problem?

They could never comprehend why their superiors held such hostility for Mount Hua.

“Didn’t your sister tell you? Our two sects cannot live under the same sky.”

Ki Mok-Seung was different from these disciples.

He grew up listening to countless stories of Mount Hua. How much Mount Hua had made the Southern Edge Sect suffer, and how they arduously struggled to survive while Mount Hua was thriving.

“It’s disgusting enough that Mount Hua’s disciple dared to confidently stroll into Xian, but he even shares the same name as the Plum Blossom Sword Saint, which I hate the most!”

“…”

The disciples exchanged glances between themselves.

‘So, it’s because of that.’

‘The Plum Blossom Sword Saint died over 100 years ago, but he’s still spoken of here.’

‘Mount Hua’s disciples don’t even seem to remember the name of the Plum Blossom Sword Saint, but it seems like we hear his name more than our own ancestors.’

Plum Blossom Sword.

Plum Blossom Sword Saint, Chung Myung.

People of the Southern Edge Sect do not add the word ‘Respected’ when talking about Chung Myung. They would never put such a noble word on that man.

Lee Song-Baek looked at the elder.

Anyone could tell that his elder’s obsession was abnormal, but even so, Ki Mok-Seung was the elder and their mentor.

Normally their elder was very kind and gentle, at least, if no stories of Mount Hua came up.

“Please, don’t let it bother you.”

“Are you telling me not to worry about it?”

Ki Mok-Seung’s eyebrows rose.

“That child is now going around the city saying that he can cure Elder Hwang.”

“Haha. As if that is possi—”

“His condition is improving.”

“…”

Lee Song-Baek shut his mouth.

Ki Mok-Seung did not say anything more, but the intelligent Lee Song-Baek understood what was meant.

‘What if that child really cured Elder Hwang?’

‘It would be a mess!’

Elder Hwang is a man with a strict moral code and great values. There was no way that Elder Hwang would fail to repay the favor to Mount Hua, which saved his life.

Obviously, that meant that they would do their best to support Mount Hua, both physically and internally too.

‘We have to stop him.’

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Lee Song-Baek, who quickly racked his brain, coughed slightly as he opened his mouth.

“Elder, if that child bothers you, why not just drive him out?”

“You will?”

Ki Mok-Seung asked with wide eyes.

“Yes. It would be shameful if the elder went out in person, but aren’t we simple second-class disciples? What’s so wrong with the second-class disciples of the Southern Edge Sect sparring with the third-class disciples of Mount Hua?”

“Well, won’t people spread rumors of us for persecuting a child?”

Lee Song-Baek smiled brightly.

“Who doesn’t know of Mount Hua and Southern Edge Sect’s rivalry? It’s not unusual for either side to be a bit heavy-handed when encountering one another.”

Ki Mok-Seung nodded his head.

“Besides, the Southern Edge and Mount Hua Conference is coming up soon, so it can serve as justification for requesting a spar.”

“I understand what you mean. But I cannot allow it.”

Ki Mok-Seung spoke firmly.

“He is still only a third-class disciple. Targeting a child will only serve to lower our sect’s prestige. How would the rest of the world see it if one of the great sects persecuted a child from a dying sect on the edge of collapse?”

Lee Song-Baek kept silent.

The one who was most worried about the child being here was Ki Mok-Seung.

Despite this, it would be difficult to bear any charges should he be implicated in any damage to this young disciple; so, he had to speak in his defense.

However, as a disciple, there is always a way to understand the heart of one’s elders.

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“Then, I understand that you will not allow any of your disciples to act against that child. But, if one of your disciples makes a mistake, it

would be fine as long as they are properly punished.”

“Of course. I will punish anyone who touches the child.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Ki Mok-Seung is a man of his word. So, it was true that there would be punishment and it would be severe too.

But…

After the punishment, there would be an even greater reward.

“A disciple must follow the words of their mentor. But isn’t it also the duty of a disciple to relieve the mentor’s mind? We will take care of it, so please don’t worry.”

“*Ahem.* I’ll do that.”

“Yes. Elder. I’ll take my leave now.”

When Ki Mok-Seung nodded without answering, the disciples took a deep bow and left the room.

Ki Mok-Seung looked at the scene and frowned.

‘These kids look down on Mount Hua.’

But he could understand it.

By the time these kids were born, Mount Hua had already fallen. In their minds, Mount Hua was just an old sect with a glorious past.

But Ki Mok-Seung knew.

How strong Mount Hua was in the past.

Although the Southern Edge Sect is influential now, it was hardly spoken of when Ki Mok-Seung was a child. As a child, he saw how inferior his sect was.

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In the past, the Southern Edge Sect could barely stand compared to Mount Hua. If Mount Hua hadn't been destroyed by the remnants of the Demonic Sect, the Southern Edge Sect would have never risen to shine.

'We must never go back to those days.'

Ki Mok-Seung had a determined face.

"Seeing how that child left Mount Hua and traveled this far, it's safe to assume that Mount Hua has begun to change and spread its wings once more."

He thought he trampled the sect enough for it to never stand up again, but it seems like he took Mount Hua too lightly.

"I think I'll need to speak with the sect leader once this mess is over."

There was brutality in Ki Mok-Seung's eyes.

"Isn't the elder overly sensitive? Sahyung?"

"He's always like that whenever Mount Hua's name comes up,"

"Even so. To be wary of a small child. Even though Mount Hua once stood at the peak of the world, isn't that simply a dying legend now? They've already collapsed and begun to fade away."

"That is true."

“Even if Mount Hua does return to its former glory, it won’t be able to be on the same level as us.”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

“I like that spirit, but I also agree with the elder. Mount Hua of the past is by no means easy prey to handle. Even the Southern Edge Sect in that era was unable to stand up to it.”

“Sahyung!”

“Still, the past is the past. In the end, only the strongest survive.”

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He nodded.

Go Hwi, the sajae of Lee Song-Baek and second-class disciple, asked.

“But Sahyung, what are you going to do with that child?”

“Shouldn’t we at least send him away?”

Lee Song-Baek said.

It was against Lee Song-Baek’s disposition to target a child, but it was a problem to let the child stay when his presence made the elder uncomfortable.

There was no need for Ki Mok-Seung to touch the child himself; it would be inappropriate for an elder to persecute a child.

“But what was Mount Hua thinking by sending in a child alone? If it was our sect, they would have never allowed a child to go outside the gates at all.”

“The situation of each sect is unique. Couldn’t there be some reason?”

“*Hm.* For sure, Mount Hua doesn’t seem to be in good condition.”

“How can we know the state of another sect?”

Lee Song-Baek said, and continued,

“We only need to focus on the task at hand. Don’t forget that what we need to do now is take care of the issue causing our elder’s headaches.

“Yes, Sahyung.”

“Keep it in mind.”

Lee Song-Baek nodded and thought.

“Now, how do we summon that child…”

“Wait, Sahyung. Over there.”

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“*Huh?* ”

At those words, the disciples all turned their heads to one side.

“Isn’t he the one?”

“Is that right?”

“Is he coming this way?”

“*Hmm.* ”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

He was thinking of how he could call the child here, but he was coming to them with his own two feet?

“So? Should we do this right away?”

“There’s no need to waste time.”

Lee Song-Baek took a step ahead and approached Chung Myung.

“Hello! How are you?”

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung titled his head when he saw Lee Song-Baek and the others.

Before he could even open his mouth to respond, Lee Song-Baek spoke.

“I am Lee Song-Baek of the Southern Edge Sect. It’s a pleasure to meet a disciple of Mount Hua.”

“*Ah.* Yes. Hello.”

Chung Myung replied.

Lee Song-Baek patiently smiled.

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“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to see Elder Hwang. I am checking on his condition.”

“*Ah*. I see.”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

‘This shameless child.’

Even Ki Mok-Seung couldn’t help elder Hwang at all. So, he didn’t think that this child could do anything. Yet, he brazenly said that he was here for Elder Hwang as if he could treat him.

“If you aren’t busy, would you care for a chat?”

“Yes, well. Okay. About what?”

“*Haha*. Nothing much. Haven’t Mount Hua and the Southern Edge sect developed over time by sparring with each other since ancient times? Even now, there is an event where the two sects spar with swords and exchange techniques. Do you know about it?”

“*Ah*, is that so? I didn’t know. It hasn’t been long since I entered Mount Hua.”

“I thought so.”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

‘If he’d known about our reputation, then he would never raise his head and act so confidently in front of me.’

Even though the name of the Southern Edge Sect had come out, this child’s expression hadn’t changed. No other sect’s disciples would remain so calm.

“Experiencing Mount Hua’s swordplay would be a great help to our training. What do you say? Won’t you give me insight into Mount Hua’s swordsmanship?”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

He was sure to be refused, but he had other tricks up his sleeve to push him…

“*Oh*, I see.”

Chung Myung nodded before tilting his head.

“So, you want a fight?”

“…”

Lee Song-Baek cleared his voice.

“I wasn’t asking for a fight, but spar—”

“That’s what fighting is.”

Lee Song-Baek’s eyes went blank.

What is with this child?

Seeing that expression, Chung Myung smiled.

“I am fine with a fight anytime. Just don’t regret it.”

A humble declaration.

Lee Song-Baek frowned.

Regret? Did he just say regret?

‘What a fearless child.’

Usually, Lee Song-Baek wasn’t the sort of man to judge someone based on their age or status. But this young kid from Mount Hua seemed too self-indulgent.

‘No matter how good he is.’

He isn’t even old enough to understand just how significant the difference between his sect and the other sects is, yet he is out here speaking such things.

How could he hold his head high and say such shameless statements knowing that his sect was at the bottom?

‘Let’s stay strong.’

Lee Song-Baek sighed and continued.

“You’re saying you agree to spar?”

“Yes.”

A blunt but calm answer.

Lee Song-Baek opened his mouth and asked.

“What is your Taoist name?”

“Don’t have one. I am Chung Myung.”

“Chung Myung, Chung Myung it is.”

He already knew it, but he still asked for his name.

“Look here, disciple Chung Myung. I’ll give you a piece of advice. You may think that nothing is wrong with what you’re doing, but the world’s affairs aren’t determined solely by one person. I suggest you return to Mount Hu—”

“Aren’t we going to fight?”

Lee Song-Baek flinched.

Chung Myung yawned as if he was bored and then said.

“It seems like the Southern Edge sect fight with their mouths. Why did you say you wanted to fight, only to waste my time talking?”

“…”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

‘My discipline is lacking.’

Feeling the desire to destroy that wretched bastard soar.

“There’s no need to rush. We will start now.”

As Lee Song-Baek grabbed the sword, Go Hwi gently grabbed his sleeve.

“Sahyung. You intend to do this yourself?”

Lee Song-Baek looked back at him.

“You don’t have to do it, Sahyung. I’ll do it.”

“No.”

“Sahyung.”

Lee Song-Baek answered with firm eyes.

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“There is a minimum courtesy we must show to the opponent. I am the most mature of us here, so fighting against me won’t be too shameful for that child.”

In the end, Go Hwi sighed and stepped back.

‘Anyway, Sahyung is too much.’

He was in a position to become a great disciple of the sect.

“The Southern Edge Sect’s Lee Song-Baek wants to spar with Mount Hua’s Chung Myung.”

“Ah, wait a minute.”

“…what now?”

Chung Myung titled his head as he looked at Go Hwi and said,

“Lend me your sword.”

“…”

Go Hwi’s eyes widened.

‘Borrow my sword? How could a disciple from a once prestigious sect be like this?’

When entering a sect that teaches swordsmanship, the first thing one learns is to never let another person lay hands on their sword!

“Are you saying that disciples of your sect don’t even carry their own swords?”

“Well, I am sorry for not expecting a fight.”

“Mount Hua is…”

“Don’t bother if you don’t want to.”

Chung Myung turned around.

“I’ll check and see if there is anything, like a stick, worth using instead of a sword…”

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Lee Song-Baek frowned.

“Lend him your sword.”

“Sahyung!”

“Do you want people to say that disciples of the Southern Edge sect fought a disciple of Mount Hua when he didn’t even have a proper sword?”

“…”

Go Hwi sighed deeply at Lee Song-Baek’s words. Soon after, he took off the sword tied to his waist before throwing it to Chung Myung.

“Thanks.”

Chung Myung took the sword, held it in one hand, and looked at Lee Song-Baek.

“Let’s get started, shall we?”

“…won’t you unsheathe it?”

“I am not planning on killing you or anything. It’ll stay like this. You can unsheathe yours if you want too though.”

Lee Song-Baek closed his eyes.

‘Shit! Shit!’

The more he talked to this kid, the more it felt like all his years’ worth of mental training was disappearing.

Lee Song-Baek closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and raised his sword.

Initially, he planned to just scare him off, but now he thought it wouldn’t be enough.

Aside from his personal feelings…

‘Judging from the way he talks and the way he acts, he won’t understand until he’s been broken apart.’

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Lee Song-Baek, who judged Chung Myung’s character through the short conversation, was ready.

“Don’t let your guard down.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Chung Myung lifted the sheathed sword.

Seeing that, Lee Song-Baek frowned.

“You had better do it right. My hands are strong and fast. It will be too late to regret after you’ve been struck.”

“Excuse me.”

“Hm?”

Chung Myung sighed deeply and said,

“Hurry up, will you? What are we still standing around for? Come at me.”

“…you!”

Anger deeply covered Lee Song-Baek’s face.

“I’ll change that attitude of yours!”

In the end, he threw away all the manners a Taoist had to have and flew towards Chung Myung.

Phat!

The clear and simple sword of the Southern Edge Sect.

Among the Ten Sects, each sect was famous for their swordsmanship or their Taoism with distinct characteristics of their own. The Wudang Sect’s sword is known to be soft, Mount Hua is splendid, and the sword of the Southern Edge Sect was serious.

A heavy sword, excluding all changes and tricks, very much like the past, struck

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towards Chung Myung's neck.

Chung Myung slightly raised his sword and blocked the attack.

Kang!

The blade and sheathed blade collided, producing a sharp metallic sound.

"Tah!"

Lee Song-Baek swung his sword again, this time aiming for Chung Myung's flank.

Fast and strong. Even if there was time for a counterattack, no one would have the courage to counterattack due to the sword's immense force, which desired to split his waist in half.

Kang!

And again, Chung Myung lowered his sword to block the attack.

He hesitated.

Chun Myung, who couldn't handle the weight of the heavy sword, took a step back.

Lee Song-Baek noticed this slight hesitation and swung his sword to drive Chung Myung further into a corner.

"Whoa."

Go Hwi, who was watching the match, smiled leisurely.

"Sahyung seems quite angry. He doesn't seem to want to end this."

"Huh?"

“That kid just kept saying whatever he wanted and ended up pissing off Sahyung. Tsk tsk. You really need to judge who you can and can’t afford to offend.”

“Is Sahyung scolding that child now?”

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“Yes. He can finish this match whenever he wants to, but can’t you see that he’s trying to hold back? I’m sure that kid must feel like shit right now just trying to survive Sahyung’s onslaught.”

As said, Chung Myung was constantly moving back and forth.

Looking at the sight unfolding in front of them, Wei Han-Su titled his head.

“Doesn’t it seem like he’s blocking a little too well, though?”

“That’s the great thing about Sahyung. What would people say if Sahyung took down a child in an instant?”

“Ah…”

“He quickly grasped the child’s limitations and pushed him with enough strength and speed to just barely continue blocking. He doesn’t even need to hit him to teach him a lesson.”

Go Hwi looked proud while saying that.

“Honestly, he doesn’t need to go to such lengths to educate that kid. That kid should be thankful for this lesson. You too, stop doubting Sahyung.”

“Yes!”

Go Hwi clicked his tongue.

‘It’s hard to believe that someone as gentle as Sahyung has gotten so angry. Well, anyone would get angry at that child’s attitude. I just hope Sahyung doesn’t get too excited.’

However, despite the thoughtful appreciation of the crowd, Lee Song-Baek, who was attacking, was giving it his all to beat Chung Myung.

Kang!

‘Blocked again?’

It was strange.

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It shouldn’t have been blocked.

Contrary to what Go Hwi was saying about controlling his speed and strength, Lee Song-Baek was constantly accelerating.

‘So why am I being blocked?’

Chung Myung’s sword wasn’t fast. It wasn’t slow, but also not fast enough to make the opponent wary.

However, even with that, he could block Lee Song-Baek’s sword.

That slow sword seemed to pre-emptively arrive and patiently await where Lee Song-Baek would strike.

‘I haven’t even thought about where I’m going to strike, but he’s already there. What the hell is going on?’

Could he read sword movement?

No, he wasn't at that level.

There was no way a young disciple of Mount Hua could read swords, and even if he could, it would be impossible to do it in action.

To block his sword with that slow sword, it was as if he could read minds… no, even before Lee Song-Baek decided on a path, that kid was moving his sword.

How could such a thing be possible? Was he a ghost?

"Ahhh!"

Lee Song-Baek groaned as he swung his sword.

No matter how much he looked at the child, he judged that he couldn't be any older than fifteen years old. Considering his age, he should be around his younger brother's age. However, such a child blocked Lee Song-Baek's sword without any difficulty.

His sword was one of the most renowned within the Southern Edge Sect!

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'Impossible!'

Lee Song-Baek's sword began to shine with qi.

Clearly, the spar began with only a little strength, but now he had unknowingly induced internal qi as his strength rapidly rose.

Swosh!

A strong gale gushed out from the sword.

Kang!

Lee Song-Baek's sword, which was lightly surrounded by internal qi, couldn't push away Chung Myung's sword.

Wall.

It seemed like a wall.

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get through it. It felt like a wall made of hard steel.

"Eik!"

Lee Song-Baek swung his sword as hard as he could.

"Hyat!"

Seeing the wind fluttering around Lee Song-Baek's sword, Go Hwi screamed.

"Sahyung! Don't overdo it!"

Go Hwi's shrill voice echoed clearly in Lee Song-Baek's ears.

'Ah! What did I do!

Lee Song-Baek quickly called back his qi. The heavy internal energy dispersed from the blade as the momentum lowered, and what he swung was a barren sword that was merely a bit faster than normal.

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Kwaang!

There was an explosion from out of the blue as Chung Myung's body shot back like an arrow in flight.

"Huh?"

He was stuck to the wall.

Slide!

Thud!

There were cracks spread like spiderwebs along the wall that Chung Myung struck.

His body slowly slid down before settling on the floor.

"…"

Lee Song-Baek was in shock.

"Sahyung!"

Go Hwi ran to him in panic.

"What did you do?"

"Ah-No, I…"

Obviously, he recalled his qi from the final strike.

Even with all his might, he couldn't cause a scratch on Chung Myung. It made no sense for the child to be pushed back so much without the sword even striking him.

It was then.

“Ughhhh.”

Chung Myung, who collapsed on the floor, convulsed, and suddenly began to spurt

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blood from his mouth like a fountain.

“Heeeiiikkkkk!”

“Uhhhhhh!”

Everyone was frightened and ran to Chung Myung. Only one person, Lee Song-Baek, stood rooted in place as the color drained from his face.

“Puaaah!”

Blood soared like a fountain rushing out.

Wow… who would imagine that blood could spurt out of a person’s mouth like that.

Anyone with eyes would believe that Lee Song-Baek was at fault for this.

“Sahyung!”

“…”

Lee Song-Baek couldn’t understand what was happening.

“Cough! Cough!”

Chung Myung's mouth was dripping with blood. He clearly appeared to be injured severely. It wouldn't be too strange even if he flopped over and drew his last breath.

Just when Lee Song-Baek managed to regain his senses and was about to run to Chung Myung.

"What the hell is going on here!?"

Everyone's eyes turned to the voice.

Lee Song-Baek had no choice but to tightly close his eyes with a grim expression.

With a face full of anger that he had never seen before, Hwang Jongi was glaring at him.

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"I asked you! What the hell is happening!?"

Hwang Jongi's voice rang out loudly.

Confused and panicked, the disciples of the Southern Edge Sect didn't say anything and stared blankly at Hwang Jongi.

What could they say?

Cough. Cough.

"…"

Right now, what they needed most was an excuse, but the blood pouring from Chung Myung's mouth would render any excuse invalid.

In this hopeless situation, not even the grandfather of Zhuge Liang's grandfather could find a suitable excuse to help them escape.

Hwang Jongi looked at Chung Myung lying on the floor and cried out.

"Hurry! Bring a physician right now! There must be a member of the outer house who hasn't left yet! What are you doing!"

"Yes! Young master!"

One of the servants following Hwang Jongi rushed to the outer garden. Hwang Jongi strode closer to Chung Myung, who was down.

"…"

The disciples of the Southern Edge sect hesitated as they opened a path for him.

Hwang Jongi knelt down and examined Chung Myung's condition. Anger violently surged in his heart as his face distorted in rage.

"You people dare claim to be righteous!"

At Hwang Jongi's words, the faces of the Southern Edge sect disciples darkened.

"Are you saying that this is how one should act against a child? I thought the Southern Edge sect would be dignified at least, but how

am I supposed to understand what just happened in front of my eyes!”

Lee Song-Baek’s face turned pale.

Would he be able to make it out of this alive?

He never intended to hurt him like that.

‘I even called back the internal qi!’

Lee Song-Baek was standing still without a word. But one thing was certain. Hwang Jongi’s expression left no room for excuses.

The servant came running back with a physician in tow at that moment. As soon as the physician approached the wheezing Chung Myung, his face stiffened.

“*Ugh!* ”

With his stiff face, he spoke.

“Hurry and move him inside! Come on! His insides are a total mess, so be careful!

Careful!”

The Southern Edge Sect’s disciples tried to assist them upon hearing that.

“Stand back!”

Hwang Jongi wouldn’t allow them to touch Chung Myung’s body. Hwang Jongi stared at them with blazing red eyes and called for his servants.

“What are you doing!? Did you not hear my words!?”

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“Sorry! Young master!”

The servants carefully embraced Chung Myung. Blood, gushing from his mouth, dripped down to his chest and settled on the floor.

“Careful! Careful!”

The physician clung tightly to Chung Myung and headed to the main house. Hwang Jongi and the other disciples watched as Chung Myung was moved.

As the fading figure of Chung Myung finally disappeared., Hwang Jongi turned his head.

“I will never forget what happened today.”

“Young master!”

“Leave.”

Lee Song-Baek’s face turned pale.

The Eunha Merchant Guild was necessary for the Southern Edge sect. Wasn’t that why even their elders came down here?

If their relationship was now in trouble, the aftermath wasn’t something the sect could afford.

As Lee Song-Baek was about to say something, a voice came from behind.

“What is all this?”

It was Ki Mok-Seung. He approached with a puzzled look in his eyes.

“Young master, what is all this? Is that blood…”

Ki Mok-Seung, who was speaking, went silent. The floor and the wall were broken, and he could guess what had happened.

‘These stupid bastards!’

Ki Mok-Seung’s gaze fell on his disciples. He sighed after seeing Lee Song-Baek, who couldn’t even meet his gaze.

“Young Master. If some accident has happened, we—”

“Are you calling this an accident?”

“—Young master.”

“The person who was here to treat my father was horrifyingly injured by your disciples. Can you call this an accident? An accident is something which happens unintentionally, am I wrong?”

Ki Mok-Seung looked at Lee Song-Baek.

His look conveyed a deeper meaning to Lee Song-Baek. Since he was the one who caused this, he should settle the matter himself.

Lee Song-Baek, who understood, bit his lip and stepped forward.

“Young master. There seems to be a misunderstanding.”

“A misunderstanding?”

Hwang Jongi exhaled in anger.

“It would be better that you call me blind. I saw with my own eyes and heard with my ears, so what could I have misunderstood?”

“I never used much force against him. There is something—”

“Look here.”

Hwang Jongi stared at Lee Song-Baek with cold, sunken eyes.

“Do you think that overextending your hand is the problem here? Why did you, a disciple of the Southern Edge sect, have to wield your sword against a child from Mount Hua in the first place?”

“It was a simple spar.”

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“Spar?

Hwang Jongi shook his head.

“I might not be familiar with the ways of warriors, but I know that spars are done between those who hold equal levels of strength. You say that you were sparring when you went against a child who was barely half your age?”

No one said anything.

If the spar had ended without accident, there wouldn’t have been anything to say.

However, with it resulting in an injured and bleeding child, there was no talking their way out of taking responsibility.

“I won’t say much. Take your disciples and leave.”

“Y-Young master, listen to my wor—”

“I said to leave…”

“…”

Hwang Jongi looked at Ki Mok-Seung and said,

“I won’t press the issue farther out of respect for the relationship we’ve shared with the Southern Edge sect for so long. But now, I don’t want to see the faces of your disciples here. Please leave this place for today.”

In the end, Ki Mok-Seung just slowly nodded his head, unable to speak up.

“I will. Young master, this was an unfortunate accident, but please remember that the Southern Edge Sect hopes for Elder Hwang’s swift recovery.”

“I wish that to be the case. But it doesn’t seem like that anymore.”

Hwang Jongi returned toward the main house. Ki Mok-Seung, who observed Hwang Jongi’s departure, turned his head to glare at Lee Song-Baek.

“Elder, I…”

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“I won’t say much. This is your fault; you deal with it. Go and ask for the young master’s forgiveness at any cost, solve the situation, and then return. I will return to the Mountain with the others.”

Lee Song-Baek’s face turned pale.

How could he possibly ask for forgiveness from the young master in this situation?

This was more like a punishment than an order. But looking at the frigid expression on Ki Mok-Seung's face, he could only stay quiet and comply.

"…I understand."

Ki Mok-Seung looked at Lee Song-Baek for a long time without speaking and then turned around.

"We're leaving."

"Yes. Elder."

The disciples all looked at Lee Song-Baek and then followed after the Elder.

Watching them leave, Lee Song-Baek bit his lip in frustration.

"How is his condition?"

"…it's not so good."

"Hmm."

Hwang Jongi's face darkened when he received the physician's diagnosis from the general head. Seeing his bleak expression, the general continued.

"According to the physician, his qi meridians are completely strained and in a dangerous situation. For now, they are trying to control the qi, but they can't guarantee a complete recovery."

"Does that mean he won't die?"

“It seems like it.”

“Thank goodness.”

Hwang Jongi sighed in relief.

Mount Hua’s disciple came to Eunha Merchant Guild to help and was beaten to death by the Southern Edge sect?

This was something he hated to even think about.

Moreover, Chung Myung had come to treat his father. Of course, the fault lay in those who assaulted him, but even the Eunha Merchant guild would be ridiculed for allowing it to occur at all.

For Hwang Jongi, personally, this was intolerable.

Chung Myung was the only person who managed to improve his father’s condition so far. Maybe, he was the only hope at ever having his father back.

Attacking such an important person and injuring him so… this would have never happened if the Southern Edge Sect had even a modicum of respect for his father and his guild.

‘That Southern Edge sect has become so arrogant!’

Normally, he would have tried to see both sides of the situation. But when he thought about their attitude and Ki Mok-Seung’s words, it was difficult to trust them any longer.

Hwang Jongi coughed several times in discomfort and looked at the general.

“Then, how long will it take for him to awaken?”

“He should be up in two or three days…”

“*Hmm.* In the meantime, I only pray my father’s condition doesn’t worsen.”

Hwang Jongi let out a deep sigh.

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He thought he had finally found a way to help his father, but this had to happen. It seemed like the heavens had turned their backs on him.

The general head, who glanced at Hwang Jongi’s expression, carefully spoke.

“But Young master…”

“*Hm?* ”

“Will this child really be able to cure the Elder? I’m not that confident in him.”

“Is there anything we lose by believing him?”

“That is true, but…”

Hwang Jongi spoke firmly.

“Of the many people we called for, none have been able to figure out father’s disease.

But this child from Mount Hua could list the symptoms without even looking at my father. Didn’t my father’s condition improve a little too?”

“Yes.”

“This isn’t some vague belief that I have in him. I feel like Heaven is trying to help us a little. Anyway, we just have to ensure that this small child recovers properly. Don’t hold back on supporting him.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Then, I’ll take my leave for now.”

“Yes.”

The general head bowed and got up from his seat.

“*Hmm.* ”

Hwang Jongi, who watched him leave, let out a low sigh.

Wheeze

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Wheeze

A low, feeble breath escaped from the corner of Chung Myung’s bedridden mouth.

His face was pale and tired, seemingly devoid of blood, which showed how precarious his condition was.

It was slow and quiet with no consistent rhythm, but it continued, nonetheless.

However, it wouldn’t be strange if he stopped breathing entirely.

Wheeze

Only the short and weak breathing filled the room when a strange silence followed.

Click!

The door opened with a slight sound. And then, nothing happened for a while.

Did a few minutes pass?

Kiik!

The door began to open carefully.

Before long, a man carefully snuck his way in. A cautious movement, not even letting his footsteps make a sound. The room was blanketed in total darkness, leaving it impossible to recognize who had entered.

The man snuck in like a cat hunting for food as he came to Chung Myung's side.

Wheeze

Wheeze.

The sight of Chung Myung breathing weekly with a pale face caught the eye of the silent intruder.

The mysterious figure, staring at Chung Myung's face, slowly raised his hand.

Their fingertips were dyed an eerie black as if coated in ink.

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"I have no grudges against you; just think of this as the price for disturbing my work."

The man mumbled to himself, then slammed the blackened hand towards Chung Myung's neck.

At that moment

Grab!

Chung Myung, who should have been exhausted and tired, suddenly pushed aside the blanket and grabbed the man's wrist.

"*Ugh!*"

Chung Myung looked at the man with a tired complexion.

"…"

A strange smile on his face, the most wicked and triumphant kind.

"I got you, you son of a bitch!"

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"I got you, you son of a bitch!"

Chung Myung smiled as he got up. The man tried to retrieve his wrist from Chung Myung's grasp but was unable to free himself from the firm grip.

"You!"

The man quickly raised his other hand to strike Chung Myung. But, at that moment, the door burst open wide, and the room lit up.

It was Hwang Jongi.

Step step.

He walked in with a very stiff face and spoke with a heavy voice.

“What are you doing here? General?”

“…”

Beon Ja-Bok, the general head of Eunha, looked back in shock as Chung Myung held him in place.

“Y-Young master!”

“I am asking you what you are doing here.”

Beon Ja-Bok’s expression contorted.

“I just wanted to check the condition of the small—”

Chung Myung interrupted and continued to answer for the General.

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“*Ah*, you wanted to check my condition and kill me?”

Chung Myung waved the hand he was holding.

“You’ve misunderstood…”

“Misunderstood? I like misunderstandings, too.”

Chung Myung jumped to his feet.

Beon Ja-Bok stared blankly at Chung Myung with wide eyes.

“I-It was clearly a serious injury…”

“It must have been a misunderstanding. I was fine from the beginning.”

“…you were unconscious.”

“*Oh.* I haven’t been sleeping well recently, so I just happened to be overdue for a nap.”

Beon Ja-Bok gnashed his teeth.

“You deceived me.”

“You shouldn’t say such a thing. You need to insist that it was a misunderstanding as much as possible. If you say things like that, then everyone will think you were up to something.”

“You!”

He struck Chung Myung with his left hand. However, Chung Myung neatly avoided his attack, released his other hand, and jumped off the bed.

Without looking back, he walked over to Hwang Jongi.

“Look, didn’t I tell you he would come out?”

“… *Hm*.”

Hwang Jongi nodded with heavy eyes.

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“I didn’t believe what you said, but I have nothing to say after seeing this. Of all things, I never expected the general head, whom I

believed in the most, would act like this.”

Hwang Jongi shot a soul-freezing glare at Beon Ja-Bok.

Meeting his gaze, Beon Ja-Bok knew that no excuses would work. He stared at Chung Myung with a stiff face.

“How did you come to doubt me?’

“I didn’t.”

“…what?”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“I didn’t know who the hell the wrongdoer was. You must know I’ve only been here for a few days. I just assumed the culprit would come to kill Elder Hwang’s savior if he thought I was injured and in need of recovery.

“…what if I hadn’t come?”

“You didn’t have a choice.”

Chung Myung smiled.

“It’s hard to kill the first time, but the second time comes much easier. Plus, if you kill me now, you could shift the blame onto the Southern Edge Sect. How would you willingly miss such an opportunity?

“So, you planned this with the Southern edge Sect?”

Chung Myung looked at him and said

“Nope.”

Beon Ja-Bok’s distorted face suddenly went blank.

“You didn’t?”

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“Yep, they just happened to pick a fight with me. I was thinking about how to solve this problem, but they came and created a nice situation.”

Beon Ja-Bok bit his lip.

“Internal wounds! I don’t know about anything else, but the physician said that you were severely injured!”

“If I couldn’t even deceive a normal physician, I wouldn’t have bothered planning this thing. You keep asking such obvious questions.”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“You have a lot of questions, but I have no obligation to solve your curiosity. What’s important is that you fell into the trap, and I found the man who tried to kill Elder Hwang.”

“*Hahaha!* ”

In the blink of an eye, Beon Ja-Bok looked at Hwang Jongi.

“Young Master. Surely you don’t believe that little child, right?”

“…is there a reason for me not to believe him?”

“Aren’t you normally the most rational one? Isn’t there something more important than what the child is saying?”

“More important?”

The man nodded and continued.

“Yes. Just because I tried to harm this child, that isn’t proof that I tried to hurt the Master. Why would I do such a thing? Think of how well the Master has treated me all this time; why would I bring him harm? Young Master, isn’t that why you never suspected me?”

“*Hmm*.”

Hwang Jongi frowned at it.

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It was an obvious excuse, but he wasn’t wrong.

“Then why did you try to kill the young Taoist? Why did you hide the fact that you learned martial arts?”

“That child was deceiving the young Master! Even you were seduced by his words into thinking he could help your father! How can that child help him?”

“Then you should have persuaded me!”

“Would you have listened to me? Wouldn’t you disregard me? It is easier to fool a man than it is to convince them they’ve been fooled! Killing that child was the only way to bring you to your senses!”

In an instant, there was a murmur.

Hwang Jongi turned his head.

The servants who had gathered there after the commotion began were whispering amongst themselves. Their words couldn’t be heard but judging from their expressions, they seemed to think that Beon Ja-Bok’s reasoning wasn’t wrong.

That was how persuasive his words were.

“Are you done talking?”

However, Chung Myung took a step forward.

“…”

Beon Ja-Bok stared at Chung Myung.

“It is true that I tried to kill him, but I never tried to hurt the Master. You—”

“*Ahhh*.”

Chung Myung waved his hand and cut off the ongoing speech.

“Enough. Enough. I don’t want to know the reason, and I don’t want to hear excuses.”

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“What…?”

“I’ll just have to beat him.”

Before anyone could react, Chung Myung rushed towards Beon Ja-Bok.

Aiming for Beon Ja-bok’s head, he stretched out his hand.

Chung Myung’s hand began to emit a sharp and intense light as it rang with a shrill slicing sound. Beon Ja-Bok, who could sense the power within this strike, moved to counter the assault.

Kwang!

Both hands crossed as Chung Myung retreated.

“Now, attention, please!”

He casually lifted his arm.

“T-that!”

Everyone saw the outstretched hand and doubted their eyes.

The hand which had been hit clearly turned black. Then, slowly, Chung Myung’s entire wrist turned red.

Chung Myung began to speak as the onlookers stared aghast, waiting to hear what he had to say with bated breath.

“Demon Hand.”

Chung Myung waved his hand to make sure they were all looking at him.

“Normal people cannot withstand a single hit, and their entire body turns red as they slowly die. Of course, this man isn’t very proficient, but even at his level, he can kill people. Especially if the opponent is an old man who never once trained in martial arts, it would be even easier than eating a piece of rice cake.”

“…”

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While Beon Ja-Bok was desperately struggling to organize his thoughts and plot some way out of this situation, Chung Myung said,

“Of course, if you can pinpoint another person who frequently has close contact with Elder Hwang and is able to infuse him with

demonic qi, then feel free to name him.”

A decisive blow.

Anger surged in the eyes of those who witnessed these events. Who would continue to trust this man who shamelessly betrayed their Master?

The hand Chung Myung was showing had similar symptoms to what Elder Hwang’s entire body was like.

“Y-You! A bastard who doesn’t even appreciate the grace shown to you!”

“How dare you try to assassinate our master and then act so shamelessly?”

“I won’t calm down even after I beat him to death!”

As everyone’s mood changed, Hwang Jongi no longer hesitated.

“Capture him!”

At his enraged voice, everyone went silent.

“Right now, subdue that man! If he resists, kill him!”

At his command, the servants rushed into the room. Beon Ja-Bok, who was tense, decided to fight.

“*Ack!* ”

“*Ugh!* ”

Those who entered the room were swept away by the power of Beon Ja-Bok.

“Damn it! It was almost over!”

He looked at Chung Myung with venomous disgust.

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“If it wasn’t for that little brat!”

“Who are you calling a brat?”

Chung Myung pursed his lips.

He wasn’t a brat, nor was he little, but he hated being called that.

“A little while more, and he would have been done! If I had known this would happen, I would have killed you right away! If you hadn’t planted those thoughts into that stupid young Master…”

“*Ahhh*.”

Chung Myung waved his hand.

“Well, of course, you must have something to say, but let’s talk about it later. For now, let’s finish this quickly. I am a bit sleepy since I was rudely woken up from a nice nap.”

“What?”

Beon Ja-Bok exploded.

“*Hahahaa!* You arrogant brat! I don’t know how you knew, but do you think you can defeat me with your pathetic martial arts? You? Defeat me?”

“No.”

“… *Huh*?”

“Why would I bother? There are other people here to do that. There.”

Chung Myung pointed to someone behind him.

Everyone’s eyes shifted to where Chung Myung pointed.

“…Me?”

Lee Song-Baek, who was staring blankly at this perplexing situation from behind,

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pointed to himself.

“Me?”

“*Oh*. The youngest hero has come to subdue the bad man! Please take care of yourself!”

“*Ah*, wait, me?”

“Who else?”

Chung Myung’s eyes were wide open as he asked, and Lee Song-Baek quickly understood the situation. Looking back, since all the disciples were dragged back to the sect, he was the only one here.

“W-why me…”

At that moment, Lee Song-Baek felt it was unfair. However, Chung Myung gestured somewhere with his chin. Lee Song-Baek looked and saw Hwang Jongi staring at him.

‘ *Ah*, right!’

A chance to rectify his mistake! Looking back, it no longer seemed like what happened to Chung Myung was a mistake, but that didn't matter now!

"The enemy will be dealt by the sword of the Southern Edge Sect!"

As Lee Song-Baek drew his sword and rushed forward, Chung Myung clapped his hands and cleared the way.

"Wooow! Such heroism!"

He wanted to quickly take the man down, but Lee Song-Baek had appeared behind him, so he offered him the opportunity.

Leaving the battle between the two men, Chung Myung approached Hwang Jongi.

"One matter has been resolved."

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"…it isn't over yet."

"He'll capture him soon enough. He is still a famous disciple from the sect; there's no way he'll be defeated by someone who hasn't even properly mastered the martial arts."

"Not properly mastered? He definitely injured your hand…"

Chung Myung showed the hand to Hwang Jongi.

His hand, which was black, first turned white and then red.

"…"

“I didn’t lie. It is true that he learned the Demon Hand. I just exaggerated a bit to show what happens when he uses it on one person for a long time.”

“*Huuu*…”

Hwang Jongi let loose a deep sigh.

“Are you really a Taoist?”

“Of course.”

‘The greatest and most experienced master in the world at that.’

Don’t believe me?

It is the truth!

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The general wouldn’t last much longer…

No, actually, he was lasting a lot longer than expected.

Lee Song-Baek, who had confidently jumped into the fight, had been fighting desperately for more than an hour to take him down.

He didn’t know whether it was a tense battle that made the others sweat, but it sure made Chung Myung yawn.

‘I thought he’d take him down right away. Should I have just done it myself?’

However, watching Lee Song-Baek sweating so profusely, Chung Myung couldn't bring himself to say it out loud.

In the meantime, the tired hero was smiling triumphantly as if he was proud of himself despite taking an hour to defeat the general.

'Wipe off your sweat at least… '

"*Huh*, the man… *kuak*… the man… took him down."

Hwang Jongi nodded, looking at Lee Song-Baek, who was trembling in exhaustion and spoke.

Seeing his trembling legs and ragged breathing, Hwang Jongi felt pity and couldn't stay angry at him.

"You've worked hard. The Eunha Merchant guild will never forget this help."

"Tha-thank you… thank you."

"Get some rest."

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Worried that Lee Song-Bael would collapse, Hwang Jongi excused him, and he dropped down and sat without even answering.

Normally, Hwang Jongi wouldn't have felt much gratitude for Lee Song-Baek after all that occurred. But seeing his feeble appearance, which gave everything to subdue the enemy, he let himself forget the bad deed he did in the morning.

Hwang Jongi glanced at Chung Myung.

'I don't know what to say about this situation.'

Has it really only been two days since Chung Myung appeared here?

Yet, he solved the problem, which persisted for over a year in just these two days.

‘Was this a problem which could be solved so easily?’

No way.

Hwang Jongi knew it.

Everything in life seems simple in hindsight. If this was such a simple scenario from the beginning, why hadn’t a single one of the world’s experts been able to solve the issue?

‘It’s as if an old expert resides within that little child.’

But that was impossible.

“I think it’s almost resolved now.”

“Why did the general head target my father?”

“I don’t know.”

“Didn’t you do this because you had some guess at the reason why?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“…”

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Hwang Jongi was dazed.

Chung Myung calmly spoke as if he guessed what Hwang Jongi was thinking.

“It’s the government’s job to make him reveal the reason. My job is just to solve the problem and receive the reward. Speaking of which, you do have the reward prepared, right?”

Normally, no matter how hard one worked, they wouldn’t so brazenly ask for compensation. Humans value their pride.

However, Chung Myung didn’t have any pride to take care of.

At one point, he was the famous Plum Blossom Sword Saint, the best of the Mount Hua Sect. Now though, he was just the youngest of Mount Hua’s third-class disciples; he didn’t have to care about saving his face.

Although it was a bit absurd, Hwang Jongi quietly nodded his head.

“Of course. But you forget one thing. The problem hasn’t been solved yet. I never asked you to find the assassin but to help my father recover and get out of his bed.

Right?”

Chung Myung took a deep breath.

“That comes next.”

A more confident voice than before.

Hwang Jongi replied in a firm voice.

“I promise my support to Mount Hua, even if it means turning the guild upside down and going against the world.”

As if moved by the heartfelt words, Chung Myung grabbed Hwang Jongi’s hand tightly.

Hwang Jongi smiled brightly as if he guessed that Chung Myung's heart was moved.

"You don't need to be so moved. This is least—"

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"Are you kidding me!?"

"… *huh?* "

Chung Myung's face contorted.

"The reward should be given to me, not Mount Hua! Are you saying that I do all the hard work, and they reap the rewards!?"

"…"

Hwang Jongi was speechless.

It seemed like this child was more insane than he thought.

In front of Hwang Mun-Yak lying on the bed, Chung Myung stood there with a dry mouth.

Now, so long as the treatment succeeds, everything will be solved. After that, he would be able to return with his reward.

Everything was handled perfectly.

Nothing so far was difficult. He liked that he even got to bully the Southern Edge Sect in the process. That was his favorite part.

But there was one problem…

'Honestly, I'm not entirely confident.'

Till now, everything was something he could do. But to be honest, it was impossible to know whether or not it was possible to fix the old man.

If it was Chung Myung, the Plum Blossom Sword Saint, he wouldn't have to worry about it.

No matter how ferocious the demon flower was, in the end, it was caused by demonic qi. It would be enough to simply erase all the demonic qi in the body to get

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back to normal.

But the current Chung Myung was still lacking strength.

He was very small, had little qi, and was a lot more disadvantaged.

With that, there was no guarantee that he could stop the spread of the demonic qi inside Elder Hwang's body. On the contrary, if he carelessly touched the demonic qi, then the weakened body of elder Hwang would die instantly.

"Will this work?"

He wouldn't know without trying.

Chung Myung's stomach twisted as he approached the man.

If he wasn't sure of the results, there was only one thing to do.

Elder Hwang would surely die if left alone. No matter how severe the sickness, wasn't it the basics of the path of Dao? One must never leave a man to die just because you lack ability.

“If something goes wrong, don’t resent me.”

If it goes well for the elder, then it goes well for everyone.

Chung Myung took a deep breath and placed his hand on Elder Hwang’s dantian.

Slowly, he pushed qi into elder Hwang’s body.

The qi sleeping deep within Chung Myung slowly began to flow.

Chung Myung’s qi was like a leisurely flowing river. Sometimes a violently raging river, and sometimes a gentle sea embracing the world.

However, one thing about the current Chung Myung’s qi was different from his past.

Crystal clear.

Clear and spotless. It was clear without impurities, like pure water flowing through deep mountain valleys.

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The clear and bright qi rushed into the body of Elder Hwang, which was filled with demonic qi.

Woong.

Elder Hwang’s body slightly convulsed.

The dark skin, corrupted with demonic qi, began to lighten as the vile energy retreated as Chung Myung’s energy flowed in.

‘ *Oh?* ’

Chung Myung found that shocking.

‘This is interesting.’

He had quite a bit of experience handling demonic qi, but this was his first time seeing this phenomenon.

What made this qi demonic?

It was called demonic qi because it reverses the flow. Demonic qi penetrates into other people, corrodes their bodies like a virulent poison, and aggressively pushes away any other qi.

But now, the demonic qi in Elder Hwang’s body was running away like a beast on fire rather than rushing at Chung Myung’s qi.

‘Then maybe… ’

It would be possible!

No-no!

‘How much trouble did I have to go through to collect this! This should definitely work!’

If it hadn’t been for Chung Myung obsessing over the purity of his qi, he would have gathered more than ten years’ worth of qi already.

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However, the amount of internal qi filling Chung Myung’s dantian was less than a year’s supply. Even this was only possible thanks to that miraculous pill.

Yet somehow, this tiny amount of qi he’d gathered was overpowering the demonic qi gathered in the elder’s body.

‘This is something I hadn’t expected.’

At first, he was simply trying to lay a pure and perfect foundation so that he could rise to a higher level than in the past. However, as time advanced, his obsession with pure qi grew stronger, and his progress slowed.

Just when he was thinking about whether he should release that obsession…

‘When I think about it, this is only natural.’

Pure qi is basically the opposite of demonic qi. The pure qi contains the power to purify all unclean things in the world. This energy was basically divine when compared to demonic qi. It was the purest and more perfect form of energy.

So, the demonic qi would naturally be unable to approach it.

The vicious demonic qi began to be neutralized in an instant.

Chung Myung felt it a bit ridiculous seeing the demonic qi turn to nothingness.

As he neutralized the demonic qi in Elder Hwang’s body, he began to clear his meridians and radically purified the body.

‘What is going on here?’

Cleansing the body and purifying meridians is something that would normally only be attempted with powerful medicines and only by strong warriors. How difficult would it be to purify an old man’s body which had several decades of impurities and decay?

But now, the young Chung Myung wasn’t using any pills but was merely washing away the demonic qi in the old man’s body with his own qi.

The problem was that Chung Myung did not intend this result.

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Wooooooong.

Hwang Mun-Yak's body began to tremble slightly. At the same time, his body began to turn both white and black at the same time. The area which had been purified from the demonic qi was white, while the areas which still remained tainted were dyed black.

The demonic qi was desperately trying to resist, little by little.

'Just a little more!'

Elder Hwang's body had turned into a battlefield. Even though he was unconscious, his entire body was trembling, and blood dripped from his lips.

Chung Myung clenched his teeth when he saw the dark red blood come out.

This was not a battle between Chung Myung and the demonic qi.

This was a battle of whether or not Hwang Mun-Yak could survive until the demonic qi was eradicated.

'I need to end this quickly!'

Considering Elder Hwang's condition, any hesitation could get him killed. It was better to leave everything to the heavens and make a quick gamble.

Chung Myung, who had made up his mind, raised his qi.

He pushed the last handful of qi into Hwang Mun-Yak's body. Thick drops of sweat started to flow down Chung Myung's forehead like rain.

In elder Hwang's body, Chung Myung's qi began to heat up the demonic qi. It absorbed the qi, neutralized it, and dissolved the impurities.

At the same time, Hwang Mun-yak's narrow and cramped meridians began to expand and widen.

The demonic qi, which had been fiercely resisting, lost its force and began to rush to one location. Chung Myung, who saw the direction it flowed, was startled.

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'A-No, no!'

The head.

The demonic qi, which had no place to go, flowed in the opposite direction of the dantian, where Chung Myung was injecting qi.

Elder Hwang's head was dyed black and started to swell.

Like it was about to explode!

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The demonic qi all gathered in Hwang Mun-Yak's head as if it were ready to fight.

'I can't touch it.'

It was becoming a pain in the ass.

If Chung Myung behaved clumsily and caused a collision in Elder Hwang's head, he'd be off to greet the reaper. No, maybe now, the grim reaper was already behind Chung Myung, patiently waiting for him to make a mistake.

Then, what if it was left alone?

'That's even worse.'

Elder Hwang's lower body was purified entirely, but that wasn't necessarily good news. The purified body would accept demonic qi from the head at a quicker rate.

It would happen much like ink diffusing into clear water.

If he advances, the man dies. If he retreats, the man dies too.

The beleaguered Chung Myung hesitated to make a decision for a while.

'What do I do?'

'What can I do?'

Normally, he was the sort to charge forward, but what if his recklessness caused someone harm?

He agonizingly pondered over his decision and bit his lip.

'Then… '

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He can’t charge forward, and he can’t retreat either, right?

Then, he’ll just ignore both options!

Chung Myung shifted all of his qi to one side of his body. A cornered mouse would even bite a cat, and a soldier forced against a cliff would fight to the death.

But what if there was room to escape? The rat would run, and the soldier would retreat.

‘Now, here’s a place for you to escape.’

Chung Myung opened a path.

There was nowhere to run away in Elder Hwang’s body, but there was still somewhere else. There was only one place left to escape.

That was to Chung Myung’s own body.

As soon as Chung Myung pushed his qi to one side, the pressured demonic qi began surging forth, searching for an empty vessel to occupy. The elder’s body had become unsuitable. Finding the connection between the two, the Qi rode along Chung Myung’s arm and invaded his now empty body.

“*Uh*…”

A groan leaked out.

A tingling sensation rushed through his arms and spread all over the body in an instant. His eyes began to blur with terrible pain, and his consciousness faded.

“*Kuak!* ”

Chung Myung recovered his qi from Elder Hwang's body. Then, he began to spread it through his own.

Kwakwakwa!

There was the sound of his bones creaking and crashing down.

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The demonic qi, left with no place to go, began a fierce struggle. However, Chung Myung's internal qi suppressed the demonic qi, like an occupying force, and mercilessly cleansed it.

Every part of the body seemingly turned into a battlefield.

Bang! Bang!

A roar echoed inside his body. With each explosion, unbearable pain tormented him.

However, he bit his lips with bloody eyes.

Lose consciousness here?

'Don't make me laugh!'

His pride as the Plum Blossom Sword Saint wouldn't let him.

Chung Myung stood still and waited till it stopped. Chung Myung's qi attacked the remaining demonic qi fighting until the bitter end.

Kwakwakwang!

Thousands of exploding voices echoed.

His vision turned white as his consciousness faded. Chung Myung closed his eyes.

His qi could subdue the demonic qi, but it was strongly resisting.

One round. Two rounds.

He scanned his body and, as if satisfied with his ability to cleanse it, his qi moved and then returned to the dantian.

Only after thoroughly checking his entire body did Chung Myung wake up.

"*Kuaaak*. I almost died."

No joke, it was perilous.

This demonic qi wasn't something he could have handled at his level. Even the slightest mistake would have cost either Chung Myung or Hwang Mun-Yak their lives.

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'This time, it was really dangerous. I'm not going to do this ever again.'

Chung Myung gently rubbed his dantian point.

"But it seems that it's increased a bit."

There was no particular reason it would increase, but it just felt like it had.

"…isn't it still just a rat tail?"

The qi was just the size of a small pepper. It was still a tiny fragment of what he once had, and he wasn't sure when it would grow into a large surging river.

Chung Myung sighed and turned his head to look at Elder Hwang. His face was slightly flushed, perhaps because the poison had disappeared. His health seemed to be recovering quickly.

Right.

It wasn't just the demonic qi that had been washed away. When the pure qi was pushed into him, it wasn't a body reconstruction, but the cleansing seemed like it increased his life expectancy by about 10 years.

"*Tch.* "

Thinking that he ended up doing good things for no reason, Chung Myung clicked his tongue and approached Elder Hwang.

"*Uhhhhh…"*

It seemed like the old man was regaining consciousness. His eyes were trembling as he slowly opened them.

Elder Hwang's eyes, which had been shaking back and forth with no focus, began to settle on Chung Myung.

"Who… are you?"

Chung Myung smiled brightly.

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"Me? A divine Taoist."

“…”

Elder Hwang, who was weak, trembled.

“I must have died and gone to hell.”

“…”

What the hell was that?

After Elder Hwang regained consciousness, Eunha was quickly cleaned up.

Beon Ja-Bok, who tried to assassinate Hwang Mun-Yak, had planned to kill Hwang Jongi next if his plan succeeded. He would have then moved on to his children as well. If the entire family’s bloodline died in the same manner by some incurable disease, then the public would believe it to be bad luck or a curse on the Hwang family, and Beon Ja-Bok could avoid suspicion.

In fact, the plan worked pretty well. If Elder Hwang had died suddenly, everyone would have suspected malfeasance; but since he suffered for nearly a year, no one guessed that it was an attempted murder.

Didn’t they even receive confirmation from the Tang family that he wasn’t poisoned?

If Chung Myung hadn’t arrived, the Hwang family would have died according to plan, and their fortune would have been stolen.

Beon Ja-bok revealed everything. He was the son of a merchant that used to rival the Eunha guild; he spoke with tears in his eyes as he told a heart-rending tale of his pitiable life. Well, that’s none of Chung Myung’s business, though.

“If you commit a crime, you should be punished. Where in this world could you find a person without some tragic experiences?”

The only thing Chung Myung was interested in was the demonic qi. However, he said that he simply found a corpse deep in the mountains when he was out journeying.

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Chung Myung felt like his spirit was siphoned away.

‘Well, there was no way those demonic sect people would have been this sloppy.’

No, they would have handled it carefully and quietly. After all, weren’t they the type that would kill others if they were bothered?

In conclusion, it can be said that everything went well, the culprit was found, the elder was cured, and it was confirmed that the Demonic Sect wasn’t involved.

With that, Chung Myung, who helped the Eunha Merchant Guild, was treated as their VIP.

A VERY important guest.

“*Hmm*.”

Elder Hwang sat down lightly.

“Father, you still need to be careful with your body. You just got out of bed.”

“It’s okay. I was indeed laid up in bed for a long time, but I feel even more energetic than before I fell ill.”

“Still…”

“Don’t worry.”

Hwang Jongi looked at his father with questionable eyes.

Even so, Elder Hwang didn’t back down. He might look like he would collapse any moment, but he was overflowing with energy.

“More than that.”

Elder Hwang raised his head and looked at Chung Myung.

“…disciple Chung Myung… right?”

“Yes. Didn’t you see me before?”

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“It seems like you’ve changed a lot since then.”

“*Ah*. I ate quite well.”

Chung Myung scratched his head with thick sausage fingers.

Those who saw this scene were subtly shaken.

‘His size doubled in three days.’

‘How the hell did he eat so much in three days that his clothes are about to burst.’

‘I can even see oil flowing down his skin from the fat. Why did he even bother joining a sect?’

Everyone shook their heads at the sight of Chung Myung, who had grown twice as big as before in just 3 days.

Elder Hwang was the only one who, fortunately, maintained his composure. As if to show how great of a merchant he was.

“I should greet you first.”

Elder Hwang prostrated flat on the spot. Hwang Jongi, startled at the sudden action, tried to lift him up. But, when he saw his father’s stern gaze, he backed away without a word.

Elder Hwang bowed again and opened his mouth.

“Thanks to the disciple, my life was saved. I am forever indebted to you.”

“*Ehhh*. Get up, please.”

Why didn’t he get up?

At Chung Myung’s words, Hwang Mun-Yak slowly stood up and smiled.

“I’ve heard the story from our servant. If it wasn’t for you, I would have been dead.

Even animals know the grace which saved them. If I was born as a human, yet forgot grace, then I would be worth even less than an animal.”

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‘Oh. He’s so eloquent.’

Right. That’s right.

Hwang Mun-Yak said quietly, looking at Chung Myung.

“I don’t believe there is any way in this world to repay this life-saving favor, but I want to do the best that I can. If my benefactor wants something, please speak without hesitation.”

“*Ah.* Something I want.”

“Yes.”

“*Haha.* How could a Taoist seek rewards for helping to save others? If someone were to learn about it, they would mock us.”

“I do not discriminate against anyone. If I shirk away from showing grace simply because the one who saved me was a Taoist, I will be ridiculed. It is unacceptable for me.”

“I understand your feelings… but it can’t be helped. It would cause me trouble since I came here without getting the sect leader’s permission.”

“…without permission?”

“Yes. It was urgent, so I didn’t have time to request permission.”

Elder Hwang looked at the young Taoist in front of him with watery eyes full of affection.

How could he not be moved when this child had crossed his sect gates and risked himself to travel and save him?

“You did that much!?”

“As I said, it was urgent.”

Elder Hwang was moved while Hwang Jongi narrowed his eyes.

‘He looks rather relaxed for someone who came here without permission.’

But he didn’t speak in front of his father.

Elder Hwang nodded his head and spoke with an exuberant voice.

“I will handle that problem for you. Furthermore, I won’t tell the sect leader, so tell me what you want—”

“Is that a promise?”

Elder Hwang titled his head at Chung Myung, who interrupted his words.

“—What?”

“I want a promise that you won’t tell the sect about this.”

“*Ah*… of course. I’m a merchant, so I will…”

Again, before elder Hwang could finish speaking, Chung Myung pulled out a book from his sleeve.

Hwang Mun-Yak stared at the book with a puzzled expression.

“What is that book?”

“*Ah*. It’s no big deal. I find my memory failing me and growing fuzzier as I get older.”

Getting older?

This child?

Chung Myung smiled and shook the book.

“I wrote it down.”

“…what?”

“You wanted me to tell you what I wanted, right?”

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“Right.”

“So, I wrote it all down.”

Ah.

So.

…that book?… All of it?

Chung Myung licked his finger, turned the page, and spoke with a smile.

“Now, shall we get started?”

“…”

“Now?”

“…”

Hwang Mun-Yak felt that he might have made a big mistake for the first time.

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“Father?”

Hwang Mun-Yak opened the door and nodded slightly, looking at Hwang Jongi as he entered.

“Is your body alright now?”

“Hm. It’s hard to believe, but my body feels so light that I could fly away. I feel ten years younger.”

“That is quite… strange.”

“I’m not sure how to put it into words, but I feel as lively as I did in my youth.”

Hwang Jongi looked confused.

The fact that his father, who was sick in bed for a year, had recovered was something to celebrate. However, it was strange that his sickly father’s body had recovered so quickly after lying in bed for so long. Even more bizarre was that it had grown stronger and livelier with no side-effects from the moment he recovered.

“Anyway, I am fine, for now.”

“Stop saying such things.”

Hwang Mun-Yak waved his hand,

“That young man’s ability is so amazing. It’s like I have received his grace.”

Hwang Mun-Yak remembered the first words Chung Myung said to him.

-Divine Taoist

‘It isn’t something I misheard.’

If Divine Taoist was a term used to refer to those who follow the Dao and can do things that normal humans cannot, then there was nothing more fitting to call this child aside from that.

Wasn’t he living proof?

“So, what is it? You probably aren’t here just to check my health, are you?”

“It might not be what you expect, but I am still your filial son. Isn’t it natural for children to take care of their parents’ well-being?”

“Don’t say such childish lines and get to the point. We don’t have much time.”

Hwang Jongi bowed his head.

Although Hwang Mun-Yak had only recently gotten out of bed, he still had a merchant’s insight.

‘Indeed, he is my father.’

Discussing his concerns would resolve his worries.

“Father. No, Guild Master.”

“Do tell me, young master.”

By changing their titles, the conversation would no longer be bound by personal feelings between family members but rather fellow guild members.

“I heard that you have issued an order to cut back on our dealings with the Southern Edge Sect?”

“I did.”

“And haven’t you promised quite a bit of compensation to Mount Hua too?”

“Yes.”

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“Father, The Southern Edge Sect is still a powerful sect in Shaanxi and Xian. It is dangerous for us to cut back our dealings with them and join hands with Mount Hua, which could collapse at any moment.”

Hwang Mun-Yak nodded his head without answering.

“I understand that it is only natural for the Guild Master to feel grateful to the young Taoist. However, the promised reward is excessive, and it’s dangerous for us to deepen our relationship with a crumbling sect. Please allow the businesses to continue as before.”

Hwang Mun-Yak lifted his teacup and looked into it with deep eyes.

Taking a sip of tea, he closed his eyes as if wanting to slowly savor the aroma wafting from his cup.

How long was it?

Hwang Mun-Yak quietly put the cup down and opened his mouth with a slightly more serious voice than before.

“Young master.”

“Yes, Guild Master.”

“What is the duty of a merchant?”

“That…”

Hwang Jongi thought for a bit and opened his mouth.

“It is a duty of a merchant to run a business that is upright and just, to make trades and contribute to the nation and the world.”

“*Huhuhuhu*.”

Hwang Mun-Yak nodded his head with a satisfied smile.

“Young master.”

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“Yes!”

“You have such a silver tongue. That sounds fine.”

“…Master?”

Hwang Mun-Yak firmly said.

“A merchant’s duty is to make money. Sometimes, it is fine for a merchant to violate the law and even morality in order to pursue wealth, isn’t that right?

Hwang Jongi bowed his head.

“…right.”

“If you want to do the right thing, do it with the money you earned. If you want to help others, you can help them with that money. There is no rule or morality in the act of a merchant making money. There is only efficiency.”

“Then what are we doing?”

With that said, wasn’t Hwang Mun-Yak’s current choice strange? Anyone could see that he was reducing their dealings with the Southern Edge Sect who was climbing to new heights while leveraging aid to Mount Hua, which was collapsing.

It wasn’t strange that if the Southern Edge Sect finds out about this, they will also cut off their relations with the guild.

“Did you forget how I made all this money?”

“I do remember. But…”

Hwang Mun-Yak’s method of making money was simple.

To find the value of items that others ignore and distribute them, or to find and support the most undervalued products.

Whether it is a sect, a union, or a group.

Hwang Mun-Yak had grown Eunha using that methodology, and now it was the best

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in Shaanxi.

“You mean to say that you’re investing in Mount Hua this time?”

“That’s right.”

“Guild Master, there has been a clear reason for every investment so far. But, I don’t understand this move with Mount Hua.”

“Haven’t you seen it for yourself?”

“…are you speaking about that child?”

“Right.”

“But…”

Hwang Jongi bit his lip slightly.

Chung Myung is great. There was no denying it, but only Chung Myung was good.

The ability of one person doesn’t lead to greatness for the entire sect, and even more so if it’s a kid.

“With that child, I can foresee that Mount Hua will evolve. Maybe we will see them become stronger than expected. But Guild Master, no matter how much I think about it, I don’t think that one child will be able to grow Mount Hua strong enough to compete with the Southern Edge Sect. Doesn’t this seem a bit meaningless?”

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled brightly.

“Do you think so? I beg to differ.”

“…Guild Master.”

“Young master. Merchants must always look behind the scenes and not at the picture that is shown upfront. Eunha may have once been the most important alliance to the Southern Edge sect, but now we are just one of their aides. How much longer do you think this will last?”

Hwang Jongi looked blankly at Hwang Mun-Yak.

He hadn’t thought of it until now, but looking back, wasn't Ki Mok-Seung’s attitude too oppressive and overbearing?

Even if the Guild Master was lying sick in bed, how could he dare to act so recklessly if he had any respect for the guild?

“The Southern Edge Sect has no room to grow now. Of course, they will continue to grow, but it will be at a slow pace. Though, that isn’t the case for Mount Hua. Mount Hua will experience explosive growth; if we can maintain a good relationship with them, then the benefits we can reap will be unimaginably large.”

“However, Guild Master, I don’t think there is any guarantee that Mount Hua will make it big.”

Hwang Mun-Yak narrowed his eyes.

“Hwang Jongi.”

“Yes! Father!”

Their way of addressing each other changed again.

“You sound like a child. A merchant does not wait for a reason to move. We need to create a reason.”

“…”

“We don’t have to wait for Mount Hua to grow. We need to make it grow. If we can succeed, we will be able to leap to become one of the top five Guilds of the land, not just of Shaanxi.”

“That is a difficult task. If we fail, there is no going back.”

“*hehe*. When the body becomes healthy, the mind becomes younger. So, what if we fail? Then we’ll just have to start over again. You don’t want to waste the wealth we have?”

“…”

“It is scary and unfortunate too. But I will be more ashamed if I’m unable to make

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more money than what we have.”

Hwang Jongi nodded his head.

His father had made up his mind, so any conversation would be meaningless.

“I’m still skeptical. However, if my father thinks so, then I will trust and follow you. I will help Mount Hua grow so that I can clear these doubts I have.”

“It feels good to hear that.”

Hwang Mun-Yak chuckled. Though, Hwang Jongi’s words didn’t end there.

“But.”

“*Hm?* ”

Hwang Jongi frowned and asked.

“Aren’t the wealth and rewards you’ve given the young disciple a bit excessive?”

“There’s a reason.”

“Yes?”

Hwang Jongi looked at his father suspiciously.

To which his father answered with a question and a bright smile.

“What do you think about that young disciple?”

“Are you asking about his growth?”

“Yes.”

Hwang Jongi pondered over and over and then opened his mouth.

“Considering his heart and determination, he will, of course, have an important position in Mount Hua in the coming future… ’

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Hwang Jongi spoke carefully.

This wasn’t something that could be said lightly.

“Anyway, he will play a key role.”

“No. He is already playing a key role.”

Hwang Mun-Yak shook his head and continued.

“I have lived my whole life as a merchant. I have met many great merchants and warriors, but he is the only one who has embarrassed and left me in awe like this.

Why should we waste our time searching for an Imoogi hoping to rise when there's a dragon preparing to ascend right in front of us? There is no way we can let him go."

"Is he that good?"

"You will find out soon. This sort of genius can't be understood by an ordinary person's reasoning. Don't try to understand; just watch. There will come a time when you will end up accepting it naturally."

Hwang Jongi nodded.

He still couldn't understand, but since his father said it, he decided to accept it.

But one question remained.

"Then why did you give such excessive rewards?"

"He is normally the disciple of a sect, and he has his own reasons for coming here after learning that someone is sick. Of course, he didn't come here solely out of sympathy for the sick. But his nature is good; there is no need to doubt that."

"*Hm*."

Hwang Mun-Yak spoke with a subtle smile, different from before.

"The wealth and rewards he has received now will become an indelible burden on his heart. Especially as he is young, the burden will be more intense. If his feelings of gratitude become shackles that bind us together, then this is a cheap investment to

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make.

“Cheap?”

“…actually, he took five times more than I expected. He was like a viper.”

“…”

Hwang Mun-Yak’s face flushed with irritation.

“No, how can someone so young want so much!? Damn it, if I knew that I would be ripped off like this, I’d rather pretend to be sick and send him back! He tore me apart! That young boy, he doesn’t even know to ask in moderation. Just because I asked him what he wanted, I ended up nearly crying my weary heart out…”

“Father, calm down. Someone might overhear.”

“*Ahem.* ’

Hwang Mun-Yak pushed down his true feelings and sighed a couple times.

“Anyway, if he appreciates and accepts us as close allies who live and die together, we’ll have nothing to lose.

“I understand. A close alliance like friends.”

“Right, of course. He’s a good friend.”

Hwang Mun-Yak and his son smiled at each other.

“*Hehehe*. I caught a pushover!”

Chung Myung laughed softly.

“No, it’s unreal, aren’t these people supposed to be merchants? They’re really going to give me so much just because I saved one person?

Money!

Wealth!

Riches!

Ahh! Didn’t all his ancestors say that money is the best?

He was already one of the wealthiest people in Shaanxi after he robbed his Sahyung’s warehouse, but it was always fun to see his wealth increase.

“But it wasn’t so much.”

He was just joking when he asked for half of their wealth. Just a quarter of their wealth would call for celebrations.

Of course, they wouldn’t have given such wealth to Chung Myung out of gratitude alone. They may have offered their entire fortune when Hwang Mun-Yak was still ill, but the situation and rewards would naturally change once he recovered.

It’s common knowledge that people change their minds before and after a situation resolves.

Nevertheless, to give so much wealth to Chung Myung without complaint, there must be some ulterior motive.

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However, even if they wanted something from Chung Myung, Chung Myung wasn't the kind to easily comply.

'I just won't do it.'

If Chung Myung was an average child, he might feel burdened receiving so much wealth, but unfortunately for Elder Hwang, he was no child.

Rather, he was more like an ancient fossil from the past.

If they had known, they would have taken a different approach…

"Anyway, everything has been resolved."

He rescued Elder Hwang, and in return, he promised that they would help Mount Hua. He will also head to Mount Hua with Chung Myung as soon as the preparations are done. So, it can be said that everything here was settled.

There was just one thing left…

Chung Myung smiled and looked at the person approaching.

"Hey, are you feeling well?"

Lee Song-Baek.

The second-class disciple of the Southern Edge Sect approached Chung Myung, who was lying on the wooden floor and stared down at him.

"What is it?"

Lee Song-Baek looked at Chung Myung and then answered.

"I need to return to my sect soon."

“*Ah*, that’s good. It must be lonely being here all by yourself. Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

Lee Song-Baek didn’t turn back after saying that. Seeing him standing there blankly,

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Chung Myung asked.

“Is there anything you want to say?”

At those words, he faintly smiled.

“Disciple.”

“What?”

“I understand that you set me up in order to solve this problem.”

“*Huh?* ”

“I mean, the results were good, so I can understand what happened.”

Chung Myung sat up and looked at Lee Song-Baek.

“It would be strange to call what you did a trap. Wasn’t I the one who initially sought to trap you?”

Lee Song-Baek smiled.

“So, you aren’t going to blame me?”

Chung Myung smiled.

‘This kid has a strange personality.’

Kids these days were different from the old days. All the sects which came in contact with Chung Myung were anxious and hostile towards him.

Because of that, he never bothered checking the personalities of the Southern Edge Sect’s disciples.

“Well, what do you want to say?’

“It doesn’t matter if I’ve been humiliated, put in danger, or played by you. It all happened because I was lacking.”

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Lee Song-Baek spoke with a stiff face.

“The only thing which bothers me is the time we crossed swords. I still don’t understand what happened.”

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

“So?”

“If you allow, I would like to spar with you again. This time, I have no hidden intentions like the last time and am sincerely requesting you to spar.”

Chung Myung scratched his cheek.

‘Look at this.’

He thought that this kid was going to start another fight. It was strange that he was okay with being played by Chung Myung.

He thought that the kid would charge at him like a wild boar. Instead, he chose to bury his grudges and ask for a spar to understand what happened.

‘I don’t think he’s just looking to get beat up.’

This was quite a funny reaction.

“*Hm*. what do I do?”

Sparring means comparing each other’s skills. From Lee Song-Baek’s point of view, it could be meaningful to learn something from Chung Myung, but for Chung Myung, there was nothing to gain from Lee Song-Baek.

So, there was no reason to accept the request…

“Well, fine.”

But there was no reason to reject it either.

Chung Myung stood up and pointed to the yard.

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“There?”

“Let’s go where people can’t see.”

“*Phew.* I am scared. Are you trying to be sneaky again?”

As Chung Myung pretended to slit his throat, Lee Song-Baek sighed.

“Young disciple. I’m not a fool. It is shocking, but I know that your skills are superior to mine.”

“*Oh?* ”

Chung Myung looked at him with interest.

“Didn’t I tell you? I want to know what happened last time.”

Chung Myung smiled.

“You will regret it.”

“Even then, it is fine.”

“Yes, well. Then let’s go.”

When Chung Myung moved, Lee Song-Baek followed him with a firm expression.

Lee Song-Baek exhaled a low breath.

He was nervous.

Lee Song-Baek wasn’t nervous even when he became a Sahyung, nor when he fought with his fellow disciples or Sahyungs. However, looking at Chung Myung in front of him, he felt his pulse race as his heart pounded in his chest.

‘Small.’

He carefully thought about it; this disciple was still a child.

It was embarrassing to call Chung Myung a child, but that doesn’t change that he was

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at least ten years younger than Lee Song-Baek. He was young enough to be the son of one of the elders.

‘There is at least one generation gap between us.’

A generation gap meant the difference between a teacher and a disciple.

This meant that Lee Song-Baek, a second-class disciple, could take a third-class disciple under him like Chung Myung. Of course, it was difficult for him to actually take one in because he had to concentrate on his training.

In other words, he was now holding his sword against someone young enough to be his disciple.

But what was this?

This pressure?

He recognized Chung Myung as an opponent and stood against him, but an immense pressure he had never felt before weighed him down.

‘Why am I so nervous?’

It was like standing against one of the elders. There was no way a child could be at that level, though.

In fact, not once had he felt Chung Myung trying to use his internal qi. Yet, it felt like a fierce opponent was standing on the other side.

Biting his lip, Lee Song-Baek tried to re-ignite his fighting spirit.

‘I need to check this with my own eyes.’

And he looked.

‘He seems to have good senses.’

Chung Myung was quite interested upon seeing Lee Song-Baek, whose sword was already shaking.

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Right now, Chung Mung poses no threat to Lee Song-Baek. However, Lee Song-Baek was unable to relax, as if a mighty warrior was peering down at him.

Pretty sharp senses.

‘He might one day become the Southern Edge Sect’s Supreme Sword.’

In the past, when Chung Myung was that age, were there people of the same caliber in the Southern Edge Sect?

Well. Not sure.

It was a time when Chung Myung held no interest in others. He was too busy sharpening his own sword skills and trying to avoid getting caught by his Sahyung for doing the wrong things.

Even then, he couldn’t think of anyone in the past that could match up. A person with great senses meant greater potential to grow.

He might not stand out much right now, but as he gets older and trains more, he will begin to advance several times faster compared to the others. He could even become the Southern Edge Sect’s Supreme Sword in the distant future.

But the sad thing is…

‘He was born into the same era I was reborn into.’

Chung Myung gently raised his sword.

Should he teach Lee Song-Baek a lesson?

“Are you coming?”

When Chung Myung shook his head and pointed the sword at his opponent, Lee Song-Baek shuddered and backed away slightly before pulling his sword forward with clenched teeth.

The fact that he was still standing there showed how desperately he was trying not to back down. After taking several deep breaths, Lee Song-Baek struggled to open his mouth.

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“Can I ask you one thing before we start?”

“Yes. Anything.”

“Who is Young Disciple?”

“…I am Chung Myung of Mount Hua.”

Lee Song-Baek clenched his teeth.

“How are you so accomplished? You clearly can’t have been learning the sword for a long time.”

‘I learned the sword for a hundred years now, you bastard.’

Chung Myung hated how his age was always being used against him.

He didn’t like it as, in the past, Chung Myung was a lot stronger than he was currently.

It had been less than a year since Chung Myung started training, and he progressed slowly as he chose to build a stronger foundation.

However, he had already focused on polishing his sword for over ten years in the past and reached a point that no one dared to challenge him.

So, there's nothing to be flustered about.

"The world is inherently unfair."

"…"

"But that doesn't mean that you don't have a chance either. The important thing is to believe in your own path, isn't it?"

"Are you saying that if I believe in my sword and work hard, I will be able to defeat you someday?"

"*Ahh*. Could be."

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Chung Myung waved his hand.

"But it is fine. You won't be ashamed if you can't win against me. Rather, you will understand that it is an honor to have shared a duel with me."

"Weird. Too weird."

Lee Song-Baek's eyes sunk in.

As they talked, it seemed like he gradually relaxed a bit.

“Be careful. I know that I’m not good enough, so I’ll do the best I can from the start.”

“Sure.”

Lee Song-Baek slightly twisted his sword.

Seeing that, Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

‘What is this?’

A small change in the sword’s movement. The Southern Edge sect values precision and sharpness. There was no way they could twist the sword like this. Showing the blade and moving it in front of the opponent is mainly used in the Illusion Sword technique.

Right.

A Mount Hua sword technique.

“I will deal with you using the Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword.”

“Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword?”

Chung Myung tilted his head.

Did the Southern Edge Sect have such a technique?

Normally, they had the Thirty-Six Movement Tanxia Sword. It seemed like something new had been invented in Chung Myung’s absence.

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“Here I come!”

“Yes.”

“*Ahhh!* ”

Lee Song-Baek screamed and rushed towards Chung Myung.

Chung Myung had a gloomy look as he watched this approach.

‘What do I do?’

Should he trample on the juniors of the Southern Edge sect? Or teach them kindly and help them grow?

‘ *Tch*, no matter how bad my personality is… ’

If the opponent was an elder or a great disciple, the situation would be different, but now it was a child. The priority was to teach…

It was then.

Lee Song-Baek’s sword changed.

It wasn’t fast, but heavy. Not flashy, but colorful.

A change that was entirely different from the Southern Edge sect’s methods, which Chung Myung was familiar with until now, unfolded.

Upon seeing the change, Chung Myung’s face contorted like a demon in a fury.

“This—”

Chung Myung’s wooden sword swung furiously.

Kwaang!

Lee Song-Baek coughed up blood and fell back in just a few seconds.

However, Chung Myung wasn't satisfied, so he grabbed Lee Song-Baek by the collar

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and pulled him close to his face.

Seeing Chung Myung's demon-like visage, Lee Song-Baek struggled to breathe.

"You, where did you learn that technique!?"

"*Co-Cough*. T-that…"

"You…"

Chung Myung bit his lip.

Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword technique.

What bullshit!

Those words may deceive those who don't know any better, but Chung Myung wouldn't be deceived.

The change was dull and clumsy, but the basic form of the sword was something Chung Myung knew very well.

'Plum Blossom.'

The sword of Mount Hua. A sword representing Mount Hua. A sword that was the essence of Mount Hua.

Twenty-Four Movement Plum Blossom Sword technique.

The Twenty-Four Movement Plum Blossom Sword technique, which was lost in Mount Hua now, was unfolded in the hands of Lee Song-Baek.

“W-where did I learn— *Cough*.”

Blood gushed out of Lee Song-Baek’s mouth. Seeing that, Chung Myung sighed and let go of his collar.

‘I went a bit too far.’

Even if it was unacceptable for Lee Song-Baek to use that technique, there was no way he could treat this child like that. Lee Song-Baek didn’t have the ability to create a new technique.

“*Tch.* ”

He stretched out his hand and hit Lee Song-Baek on the back of his neck.

Tak!

As Chung Myung’s qi entered Lee Song-Baek’s body, his trembling subsided, and he let out a sigh as his expression eased.

Confirming that he had calmed down, Chung Myung stood up and looked at the sky.

Chung Myung, who had been looking thoughtfully at the sky for a long time, asked.

“Is that the Southern Edge Sect’s new technique?”

“…yes”

“Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword technique?”

“Yes.”

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Chung Myung smiled bitterly.

‘They twisted the name?’

This was nothing short of open provocation towards Mount Hua, who knew what would happen if they learned about this.

‘No. That’s not it.’

These people claimed it as their own and displayed the technique openly. Most likely, the current Mount Hua wouldn’t even be able to recognize it for what it was.

This was making a mockery of Mount Hua.

If Chung Myung hadn’t appeared, Mount Hua wouldn’t have known anything even after watching the men of the Southern Edge Sect use their sect’s technique.

The evil man who made this sword was the only thing clawing away at Chung Myung’s mind.

“Who all learns this sword art?”

"…"

"What, are you overthinking it?"

Lee Song-Baek nodded.

"From the second-class disciples."

"From the second-class. So, the first-class, second-class disciples, and the elders have all learned this sword?"

"I heard that the elders didn't learn it. Those who are learning are first and second-class disciples."

"They haven't learned…"

As his words trailed off, Chung Myung's eyes lit up with a fearsome glint.

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If one of the elders had invented this new technique, they would have definitely transmitted it to the first-class disciples below them.

'Then… the person who completed this sword technique is still in the sect?'

This was good news.

If the man who committed this crime was already dead and buried, then who would be left to receive retribution?

'I don't know who it is, but I will make sure that he pays the price for this!'

Chung Myung gritted his teeth.

There was no need to think.

When the Demonic Sect invaded Mount Hua, the Southern Edge Sect must have come to help. The invasion was too brutal. If they had decided to stand by and simply watch their neighbors' downfall, then they would have been criticized by the rest of the world.

'They pretended to help, but in reality, they stole techniques from Mount Hua.'

Not everyone had done this. However, some people took advantage and did something that shouldn't have been done when Mount Hua was burnt down.

Maybe…

'I don't even know if the downfall is because of that Demonic sect.'

Crunch!

Chung Myung clenched his jaw and ground his teeth together.

The more he thought about it, the more he couldn't stand it.

"These bastards…"

Chung Myung risked his life to save the sects from danger, and this is how they returned the favor to Mount Hua?

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Moreover, wasn't this just plain greed?

People make mistakes. It is in their nature. Let's say that someone from the Southern Edge Sect came to help Mount Hua and was blinded by greed and made a mistake in a moment of weakness.

Then wasn't it the duty of the sect to correct it?

The sect should strictly rebuke them and return what was stolen, not create new martial arts from it. And they have even named the technique Snow Flower? Were they mocking Mount Hua?

"What a load of shit."

Chung Myung grunted, looking at Lee Song-Baek.

"You!"

"*Uh?* Ah… yes!"

"Don't learn this."

"*Huh?* Why?"

"I said don't, so don't! You bastard!"

Chung Myung hit Lee Song-Baek on the back of his head.

He whimpered as he held his head.

"*Tch.* "

Chun Myung, who felt irritated, looked at Lee Song-Baek and spoke.

"This is unattainable."

"…"

Lee Song-Baek looked at Chung Myung with blank eyes. However, he knew this was the truth.

If Lee Song-Baek hadn't come and asked to spar again, then it may have taken Chung Myung several years or longer before learning about the Southern Edge Sect creating this technique.

It can be said that Lee Song-Baek helped him.

Chung Myung is a man who repays grace shown and never forgets grudges held.

Although indirect, this grace was a bit much to ignore.

"The Southern Edge's martial arts are centered around the basics. They seem slow and heavy right now, but it gets stronger once the sword is sharpened and polished.

If you hope to achieve greatness, stop learning this right away."

"But the elders say that this sword is one step ahead of our existing sword technique."

"Of course, they would say that."

Because not a single person must have managed to fully master the Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword technique.

Brilliant techniques advance quickly yet stagnate further in development. When a person who focuses on their foundation and honestly trains the basics and a person who learns complex and flamboyant techniques fight one another at a superficial level, then the flamboyant one will win every time.

'No, doesn't the Southern Edge sect understand… '

"*Ah*…"

Chung Myung sighed.

'I think I know.'

The main culprit behind all of this might be Chung Myung himself.

The Southern Edge Sect must also be proud of their own sword techniques. However, Chung Myung, who they hated for decades, died in the battle with the Heavenly Demon Sect. The Southern Edge never once defeated Chung Myung.

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Then was the sect weak?

Absolutely not.

‘If they were weak, they would never occupy a spot among the Ten Great Sects.’

On the contrary, the Southern Edge Sect had many geniuses. Throughout the history of the Southern Edge Sect, they always had talents blooming within.

These geniuses existed in Chung Myung’s time too, but these geniuses all crashed head-first into the great wall that was Chung Myung…

‘No wonder they were skeptical about their techniques.’

Idiotic people.

‘If I had been in the Southern Edge Sect, then I would have been the Southern Edge Supreme Sword.’

It’s not the martial arts that matter. No, martial arts are essential, but the person who uses and wields the technique matters most.

“Well…”

At that time, Lee Song-Baek glanced at him and opened his mouth.

“I shouldn’t learn the Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword technique?”

“Yes.”

“But…”

Lee Song-Baek hesitated to speak, to which Chung Myung glanced at him and said in a severe tone.

“Your path cannot be defined or set by others.”

“…”

Lee Song-Baek looked at him with a different expression.

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“Some decisions require you to heed advice from others, but the real decisions in life need to be made by oneself alone. Neither the words of an elder nor mine will help you.”

Chung Myung turned around, and without hesitation, he started to walk towards the Eunha Guild.

“W-wait!”

Chung Myung stopped and slightly looked back.

Lee Song-Baek bowed.

“Thank you for your guidance.”

“Well, it was nothing.”

Chung Myung waved his hand and moved on.

Lee Song-Baek kept looking intensely at his moving figure and took a deep breath.

“I feel like I met a Divine Taoist.”

Meanwhile, Chung Myung’s face flushed red in anger and cooled.

“The more I think about it, the more rotten you bastards are!”

How dare they steal Mount Hua’s technique. And copy it? He wanted to run over to the Southern Edge Sect right now to crush it down.

“*Ahh*. Sahyung. This is how the world is. Instead of properly repaying the favor, these bastards did this bullshit. Do I have to put up with this?

-What can you even do aside from putting up with it?

It seemed like his Sahyung was laughing while looking down at him.

“*Ah*, if only I was as strong as I used to be…”

If Chung Myung was the Plum Blossom Sword Saint, then the elders of the Southern

Edge sect would have already been dead. Unfortunately, he was just a third-class disciple.

‘I need to get stronger faster.’

It was that same feeling again.

This was a world where strength mattered, and those without power couldn’t do anything. Even if the elders of Mount Hua knew of this, could they do anything about it?

No.

The strong had the privilege to enjoy power, and the weak had to stay silent. The current Mount Hua didn’t even have the strength to accuse the Southern Edge sect.

“Only for now.”

Chung Myung gritted his teeth.

“But the time will come.”

Eventually, Mount Hua will regain its former glory. Chung Myung would make sure of that for as long as he lives.

If there was one thing he confirmed today, it was that Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect are completely incompatible.

Since the Southern Edge Sect had crossed a line they shouldn’t have, it was impossible for Chung Myung to even try and get along with them.

Even if the others wanted to, Chung Myung wouldn’t tolerate it.

“I need to get stronger faster.”

He needs to get stronger, but so does the entire sect. If Mount Hua grew stronger, things would change, and they wouldn’t need to be so restrained.

Chung Myung had no intention of making Mount Hua rely on him alone. He was going to bring the entire sect to power this time.

That way, those insolent fools can be adequately punished.

‘Twelve Movement Snow Flower Sword technique… ’

It’s well made.

It’s a clumsy copy of the Twenty-Four Plum Blossom Sword. However, they didn’t simply modify Mount Hua’s technique and ignore their own. Instead, they thought deeply about how to blend the Southern Edge Sect’s martial arts together with Mount Hua’s technique.

There were traces of the Southern Edge Sect’s sword arts within it, and the technique’s speed was also adjusted to harmonize with their martial arts.

It wasn’t just a copy, but the creation of a full-fledged martial arts technique…

“Which is why it’s so troublesome.”

A playfulness that couldn’t be hidden appeared on Chung Myung’s face.

“I’ll leave you alone for now but will slowly scorch you soon enough.”

Just sitting around watching didn’t fit Chung Myung’s character. If his enemy was going to be defeated, then he needed to be the one who brought his enemy to their knees. It wasn’t his style to wait around for their destruction.

“You crossed the wrong person.”

Chung Myung looked to the south and clicked his tongue while gazing at the mountain in the distance.

“I will make sure you pay the price for touching Mount Hua without showing grace, Southern Edge Sect.”

Then he turned around and walked back to the guild.

But, at this time, Chung Myung didn’t know.

The opportunity to punish the Southern Edge Sect, which he thought would be in the distant future, would come quite soon.

Mount Hua was in a state of turmoil.

Seven days had passed since a third-class disciple had suddenly disappeared from Mount Hua. This was a huge thing.

Of course, when Mount Hua collapsed, there were more than just one or two who escaped at night. But this wasn’t something common anymore.

Thanks to that, the atmosphere in Mount Hua was horrendous.

“…could he have been in some kind of accident?”

“Accident?”

“It doesn’t seem like he is going to come back no matter how long we wait. But, I don’t see any reason for him to abandon Mount Hua, right?”

“Right.”

Yoon Jong nodded his head.

Jo Gul had said it. Chung Myung had no reason to leave Mount Hua. If he had even the slightest intention of doing so, then he wouldn’t have given away that pill.

Did he give away such precious medicine just to leave Mount Hua immediately after?

Rather, maybe he gave them poison and left before it could take effect.

But…

“If Chung Myung doesn’t have a reason to abandon the sect, but he still hasn’t come

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back after all this time… doesn’t that mean something bad happened to him?”

“Gul.”

“Yes, Sahyung.”

“No matter how hard I try, I just can’t imagine him getting into an accident.”

“…”

“Can you imagine it?”

“I can—”

Chung Myung's smiling face flashed through Jo Gul's thoughts. Of course, not a warm smile but a wicked one.

' *Ehh*. No way.'

Even if he was thrown down a cliff and then an even bigger cliff, Chung Myung would find a way to survive even in hell. It was impossible for him to not come back.

"Then, what happened?"

"It would be nice if it was something which could satisfy the elders. They seem quite angry."

"Yes…"

"Sasuk Un Geom has been summoned to the sect leader's residence again. I'm worried something bad is going to happen."

"*Sigh.* "

Yoon Jong frowned and turned his side.

'What the hell is going on with him?'

Even though he thought everything would be fine, Yoon Jong was strangely worried about Chung Myung,

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"Isn't he too arrogant!"

Hyun Jong frowned at the sharp voice.

"It has been seven days and nights already. This is the first time a third-class disciple has been away for such a long time without

permission.”

“*Hmm*.”

“This isn’t something we can overlook. Now, the sect is finally re-establishing its foundation, what will others think!?”

When the head of finance, Hyun Yeong, raised his voice, everyone nodded. Clearly, this wasn’t something to overlook.

It was then that Hyun Sang, the head of Martial Arts, spoke.

“Now now, calm down, Sahyung.”

“How can I be calm now?”

“Why are you thinking about it like that? What if the child has gotten in some accident? He might need help right now.”

“Accident? What are the odds of an accident happening on Mount Hua? Even if it’s true, he walked out on his own two feet. Does that mean that it’s our mistake?”

“He may have lost his footing…”

“… *Ummm*…”

Realizing that this possibility made sense, Hyun Yeong immediately closed his mouth.

Mount Hua is indeed a steep mountain. It was common for people to trip and get injured. Even skilled warriors would occasionally get into danger; it wouldn’t be strange if a third-class disciple died.

“Shouldn’t we search the Mountains? If he is injured…”

“Right, we should search.”

Hyun Jong, who was silent, answered with a heavy voice.

“We can certainly not rule out that possibility.”

However, Hyung Yeong didn’t give up.

“Even so, we cannot let this slide. Isn’t this only a problem because a third-class disciple left Mount Hua on his own accord? Why was that child even given permission?”

Hyun Jong’s face slightly hardened.

It was none other than Hyun Jong who gave Chung Myung the authority. Now, Hyun Yeong was saying that the sect leader had given too much freedom to the child.

“There was a reason for that.”

“Reasons exist everywhere. Order can only be kept by following the rules of the sect.”

“Finance head.”

“Sect leader. This is something that shakes the basis of Mount Hua. Since when did Mount Hua give special privileges to children? He’s not even a great disciple, only a third-class disciple.”

“That’s enough.”

“…”

Hearing the heavy and cold voice, Hyun Yeong kept his mouth shut.

If he said anything more, it would cross the line. He also didn’t want to fight with the sect leader.

“…sect leader. I went too far. I didn’t mean to blame you.”

“I know.”

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Hyun Jong took a deep breath.

‘What is happening?’

No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn’t understand why Chung Myung would do such a thing. Did he give him too much authority?

‘Did I misjudge that child?’

Un Geom, who silently watched the proceedings, opened his mouth heavily.

“Sect leader.

“Go on.”

“I will call the disciples and organize a search party. We will search through Mount Hua and the village below as well.”

“*Hm.* ”

Hyun Jong nodded his head.

“You should.”

“After finding Chung Myung, I will return. It was my mistake to not discipline him properly.”

“How could it be your fault? You aren’t even his mentor.”

“I am the mentor for all the children.”

“But…”

Hyun Jong, who was about to speak, shook his head and closed his mouth. If he said anything more, it would imply that the dorms were under no one’s guidance.

“It isn’t your fault. It is mine for putting too much trust in that child.”

“Sect leader, it’s not like that.”

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“The important thing right now is not to find who is at fault. It won’t be too late to discuss the right from wrongs after finding that child. It would be a pity if we were unable to save him because we wasted too much time here, wouldn’t it?”

Everyone bowed their heads.

Even if there was a mistake, no one could deny Hyun Jong’s heartfelt concern for the disciple.

“Un Am.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

“Organize a search party with you as the head. We need to provide all the support we can in order to find that child. First, we will find him and then—”

At that moment, a loud voice interrupted the meeting from outside.

“Sect leader!”

Hyun Jong’s forehead twitched.

“I am in a meeting right now—”

“The child is back! Chung Myung is returning!”

Hyun Jong jumped up from his seat; there was a sense of relief which he couldn’t hide on his face.

“How is his condition?”

“Yes. He looks fine. But—”

“Enough. I will go and see for myself!”

There was nothing wrong, which meant there was no accident. Hyun Jong was glad to hear that he was safe.

“Wait, sect leader.”

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However, Hyun Yeong didn’t let him leave.

“What?”

“Sect leader.”

Hyun Yeong glanced around at the people around him and opened his mouth.

“I understand that the sect leader cares for that child. Considering all that he has contributed, it is natural for him to receive such treatment.”

Hyun Jong narrowed his brows.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Sect leader. Do not spoil the child too much.”

“…”

“Punishment isn’t only a tool to govern the sect, but also to nurture the people properly. If he isn’t punished appropriately for what he did, then that brat will never realize what he did wrong.”

Hyun Jong sighed.

“You think I don’t know that? Don’t worry. I’m the one who wants to raise him more righteously than anyone else. If the child is safe and well, he will be punished for half a month…”

“That won’t do.”

It was Un Geom who cut in.

“The crime of not returning to Mount Hua is serious. He should be imprisoned for at least half a year.”

“Un Geom, he’s only a child, a third-class disciple.”

“If this was something the second-class disciples did, it would be a year. Please punish Chung Myung appropriately according to the offense committed.”

Hyun Jong closed his eyes tightly.

The position of sect leader doesn’t exist so that he can impose his will on others and decide everything. It was a position that gathered everyone’s opinions to come to a decision.

“…do the others think the same?”

“Yes.”

“Sect leader. Don’t hate us. We do treasure the child’s talents, but that’s the reason we are being strict.”

Hyun Jong nodded his head.

“I know.”

Hyun Jong walked outside without loosening his stiff face. All those who were seated stood up as well.

Un Am sighed as he watched this happen.

‘What did you do? You foolish child.’

Only Un Am understood how much Hyun Jong cherished Chung Myung. So, no one except Un Am knew how he was feeling.

They nearly reached the entrance and saw Chung Myung entering the gate.

“That…”

Un Am and Hyun Jong’s faces were burning up.

No injuries. It was good that Chung Myung was uninjured, but he should have at least been self-reflecting on his sins. Yet, the child’s face showed no signs of regret at all.

Why is he walking tall with straight shoulders and acting so confidently?

“You brat!”

Hyun Yeong screamed.

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung, who noticed so many elders approaching him, tilted his head.

“Where are you all going?”

“You idiot! Where do you think YOU are going?”

“To see the sect leader?”

Hyun Yeong, who was screaming, looked at Chung Myung, who bowed to Hyun Jong.

‘Th–that guy?’

“Chung Myung.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

“Is there a reason why you left Mount Hua?”

“Yes. Sect leader. There were unavoidable circumstances.”

Hyun Jong nodded his head.

“Explain. If your explanation doesn’t convince us, you will be punished accordingly.

Mount Hua’s laws are strict.”

Hyun Yeong couldn’t stand being there.

“How dare this third-class disciple be this arrogant! If you can’t give us a proper reason, I guarantee you’ll suffer extreme consequences! Sect leader favors you so much, but this is how you repay his kindness!?”

Chung Myung looked at Hyun Yeong and scratched his head.

“No, it isn’t like—”

“You! Speak properly!”

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Firmly, an answer came from behind Chung Myung.

“Don’t behave like that, please.”

“*Huh?* ”

Only then did they realize that Chung Myung wasn’t alone.

“Elder Hwang?”

“E-elder Hwang?”

“Didn’t we receive a letter saying that you had fallen ill?”

Hwang Mun-Yak, who entered the gate, looked at everyone. Then observed the sect leader.

And he bowed.

“It is nice to meet you again, sect leader. How have you been?”

“Elder Hwang. It’s been so long since I last saw you. I heard that you weren’t feeling well; I am glad that you seem to have recovered.”

He pretended to be calm, but Hyun Jong was shocked.

‘H-how is he here?’

Wasn’t it just seven days ago that they received a letter saying he was going to die of some serious disease?

Yet, Elder Hwang was here and looked to be in perfect form. He seemed like he was the same as the last time they met.

“Sect leader. Don’t be so angry. My life was saved thanks to this young disciple. He saved both the Eunha Guild and me too.”

“Y–yes?”

“It is Mount Hua’s grace which looked after Eunha. Which is why I decided to come

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here and give my thanks in person.”

“…what on earth?”

Everyone looked at Chung Myung.

Chung Myung only grinned and shrugged.

“Well, that’s how it turned out.”

‘ *Ah!* ’

‘This brat!’

‘Somehow, it only makes me angrier.’

Chung Myung was still the best when it came to pissing off his elders.

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“So…”

Hyun Jong couldn’t hide his shock. It was the same for everyone in the room.

There were only two people who remained composed.

One was Hwang Mun-Yak, sitting opposite Hyun Jong, and the other was Chung Myung, who was made to kneel and reflect.

“That child… you’re saying that Chung Myung cured Elder Hwang and prevented a crisis in the guild?”

“Yes.”

“*Huh*.”

Hyun Jong looked at Hwang Mun-Yak and Chung Myung alternatively.

It was unbelievable.

Although he was a disciple of Mount Hua, Chung Myung hadn’t been here for more than three months. He had little time to learn and was barely more than an average child.

How could it make sense for this child to accomplish such a formidable feat?

“Elder, is this really true?”

Hwang Mun-Yak frowned at Hyun Yeong’s question.

“Do you think I would lie to you?”

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“O–of course, that’s not the case.”

Hyun Yeong backed off; the power of the Eunha Guild was so frightening that Mount Hua couldn’t afford to offend them.

Moreover, this man had consistently supported Mount Hua in the past. Without Hwang Mun-Yak, Mount Hua would have collapsed long ago. Doesn’t that mean he should be catered to as a guest of unparalleled importance?

Even if Hyun Yeong held an esteemed position as the finance head and elder of Mount Hua, he couldn’t treat Hwang Mun-Yak carelessly.

“I don’t believe that you would do such a thing.”

Hyun Jong frowned slightly, looked at Hyun Yeong, and spoke.

“It wasn’t our intention. I will apologize for what was asked, Elder Hwang; please don’t be too upset with us.”

“Well.”

However, his displeased expression didn’t relax.

He wasn’t really bothered by their behavior, but he needed to keep the others in line.

A merchant who engages in trade shouldn’t be too friendly. Even a small gap should be exploited as an opportunity to challenge the opponent…

“*Kuak!* ”

Hwang Mun-Yak coughed when he glanced at Chung Myung, who showed a displeased look on his face.

‘Come on now.’

A third-class disciple is the one saving his elders from being scolded too harshly.

Where in the world would you see a sight like this?

Hwang Mun-yak couldn’t ignore the signals Chung Myung was sending him and softened his expression.

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Un Geom spoke up.

“I don’t understand.”

Hwang Mun-Yak looked at him and asked.

“Who are you?”

“I am Mount Hua’s Un Geom. I am in charge of the dorms the disciples reside in.”

“I see, and Un Geom, you are saying that you don’t believe my words?”

“That’s not the case. I just have a fundamental question. Apart from everything else, does Chung Myung even have the ability to cure such ailments?”

“…”

A reasonable question.

Everyone looked at Elder Hwang and Chung Myung with doubt in their eyes. Hwang Mun-Yak was speechless and also looked at Chung Myung. This wasn’t something the two had discussed.

“That isn’t difficult.”

“Can you explain?”

“Yes. As you all know, I was a beggar, right?”

“Yes.”

“Beggars usually pick up anything and eat everything they can get their hands on, so they often get sick and poisoned.”

“What are you saying! If that was the case, then the Tang family could have helped treat Elder Hwang a lot earlier.”

“Yes, but you see beggars end up poisoned in unexpected ways. Most are unaware of how to relieve traditional poisons, but beggars are much more capable when it comes from something edible.”

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Taking a deep breath, he opened his mouth.

“Five Shade Grass is a plant that is found in most places. It is very similar to mugwort, but it has poison in it. Birds also often eat it and get poisoned. Once consumed, the poison begins to afflict you after a couple of days, then comes a long period of suffering and eventually death.”

Everyone was engrossed in his words.

“However, the way to detoxify it is simpler than one might think. Even if you take the person to a physician, they won’t be cured, but feeding the person a ground radish will help them recover.”

“So, Elder Hwang was poisoned with the Five Shade Grass?”

“Yes. The symptoms were very similar, so I tried it out, and he recovered.”

“No…”

Hyun Sang, who was silent until then, began to speak.

“I’ve heard a similar story. The Beggars Union is known to have the most efficient poison remedies.”

“Well, is that so?”

Chung Myung laughed internally as he saw the others questioning whether to believe it or not.

‘Ask away, you bastards.’

There was nothing to worry about, even if they went and asked the Beggars Union to check the authenticity of the information. Everything he said was true.

War was fought against supply. Getting supplies to the front lines on time was the most difficult thing in the world. So, those on the front

line would often pick up anything that could be eaten, and there are many cases of people getting sick.

The incident he spoke about was something Chung Myung had actually experienced in the past. It was the Beggars Union that had helped him.

What happened to Elder Hwang had nothing to do with this, but what do the sect leaders even know?

‘It sounds reasonable enough.’

Life is like that.

“Such a thing exists?”

“Then we can’t do much. Should we really cause a fuss over Chung Myung being a few days late when someone’s life was hanging in the balance?

“You did a great job!”

Everyone looked at Chung Myung in admiration.

“Sect leader.”

Un Geom spoke.

“If this is true. Then, rather than punishment, shouldn’t a reward be given instead?”

“*Uhm*. Indeed, you are right.”

Hyun Jong’s eyes widened a little.

“But sect leader.”

Un Am raised a slight objection.

“It is a great sin to disobey the sect leader’s order and not return, no matter how righteous his intentions were, what he did was wrong.”

“Are my orders more important than a man’s life?”

“…that…”

“Are you saying that we should praise a disciple for leaving a person to die as long as they return punctually?

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Un Am went silent.

“Mount Hua is a sect which pursues justice. What can take priority over saving people’s lives? Are my petty orders more important than life?”

“I was short-sighted.”

Un Am bowed his head.

Meanwhile, Un Am and Hyun Jong exchanged glances. Un Am was the first to speak, and Hyun Jong expressed his anger, so people wouldn’t bring this topic up anymore.

Hyun Jong, who realized Un Am’s intention behind asking this question, gave a quick glance at Un Am and looked back at Chung Myung.

“Chung Myung.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

“Well done.”

“Yes.”

Chung Myung bowed his head.

As soon as the situation was settled, Hwang Mun-Yak decided to speak.

“The Eunha Guild and I have been greatly blessed by Mount Hua. No, to be precise, I was helped by Chung Myung, but he said that it was all thanks to the teachings of Mount Hua and gave credit to the sect.”

“*Oh!* ”

“That child.”

“It’s the Path of Dao, seriously!”

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled.

‘Everything is taken care of.’

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However, it was impossible to speak the truth. From his point of view, it was better to let Chung Myung and Mount Hua be one.

It was hard to hold back his laughter as he looked at the face of Chung Myung, who brazenly accepted his elder’s praise.

“And so, to repay the kindness I received, I would like to make a small investment in Mount Hua.”

“Investment?”

“Yes. Though perhaps the word investment isn’t right. More like support. An investment has to be returned, but there is no need for such things if it was given in the form of support, right?”

“Y-You have already given so much to Mount Hua…”

“Sect leader.”

Hwang Mun-Yak looked at Hyun Jong.

“If I was planning to end it there, I wouldn’t have bothered coming here with my family. I want to pour all of myself into Mount Hua.”

Hyun Jong’s eyes trembled.

“E-elder Hwang?”

Despite Hyun Jong’s surprise, Hwang Mun-Yak only smiled.

“We brought our people so we can take this slowly. What Mount Hua needs and what we can do will all be discussed.”

“Thank you! Thank you very much, Elder Hwang.”

“There’s no need to thank me. I will fall short no matter how much I try since life cannot be measured with money.”

Hwang Mun-Yak and Hyun Jong looked at Chung Myung at the same time.

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Hyun Jong spoke with a cheerful smile on his face.

“You’ve brought a blessing over Mount Hua, and now you’ve even helped spread the name of Mount Hua. I’m almost ashamed.”

“Don’t say that. If I hadn’t learned anything here, would I even be able to do that?”

Hwang Mun-Yak was shocked.

‘Look at this silver-tongued devil.’

His words flowed smoothly like oil on an even surface.

“Then, apart from the finance head and Un Am, the others can leave and rest.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

Everyone stood up.

“And Chung Myung, I will call you later, so don’t go too far.”

“Yes.”

Chung Myung bowed his head slightly and went out with the others. As soon as they exited, the head of Martial Arts, Hyun Sang, patted him on the shoulders.

“You worked hard. It was a great job.”

“Well, I didn’t do anything too great.”

“What you did was amazing. How can it not be a huge deal? *Huhuhu*. It’s amazing enough to save a life, but it was even Elder Hwang’s life! Really, a shooting star must have come to Mount Hua!”

That shooting star was Chung Myung himself.

He was the only star here.

Chung Myung sighed, seeing these people giving all the credit for what he did to some random luck.

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Right, right. What can I do when they're so happy?

At that moment, Un Geom came.

"Chung Myung."

"Yes, Dorm Master."

"I know you did a good job, but it is true that you handled it poorly. You were in the wrong, especially for leaving Mount Hua without a word."

"I was in a hurry, so I didn't think about it."

"That's possible, but be careful next time. What you did this time was more dangerous than you thought."

"Yes. I will be careful."

"It is true that you disobeyed the sect leader's order. You can't always use the excuse that it was unavoidable."

"Yes."

Chung Myung bowed his head.

His lips were pouting.

'Why is this child so inflexible?'

However, Chung Myung, who was thinking all sorts of twisted thoughts, felt relieved when he looked up and saw Un Geom's lip twitching and struggling to hold back a smile.

"*Ahem*. Well, you should be careful and keep up the good work."

'Look at him.'

The others all approached, patted him on the shoulder, and congratulated him. The existence of Elder Hwang in Mount Hua held a deeper meaning than Chung Myung thought.

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He is a person who provides money.

And those with money are the best.

"It seems like Mount Hua's luck is finally turning around. Good fortune keeps finding us lately."

Luck?

Everything was because of Chung Myung.

Chung Myung sighed secretly.

' *Ah*, Sahyung. My back is starting to hurt now.'

He seemed to hear his Sahyung laughing at him from the sky.

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Mount Hua was in chaos.

No, it was already in a state of turmoil, but now it was in a fuss for a completely different reason.

"Elder Hwang was saved?"

"Who is elder Hwang?"

"The greatest merchant of the Eunha Guild. Even if all the merchants of Hua-Um gathered, they wouldn't be able to go against Elder Hwang."

" *Huh?* Is he that great of a person?"

"That's what I'm telling you."

The third-class disciples were all in either disbelief or shock as they spoke.

"Chung Myung saved someone that important!?"

"Wow! This is really…”

"Weird."

"I know."

"Why would he…”

It was good news, but the third-class disciples were all confused.

With this, Chung Myung's position was bound to rise, and it was clear that the adults

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in Mount Hua would favor him more. Wasn't Chung Myung already being protected by Un Geom and the sect leader?

And now he's going to get another level up?

Jo Gul smiled.

"I wondered what he was getting himself up to."

He is really a ghost-like man. Maybe the heavens were helping him?

"Isn't this too much, Sahyung?"

"Well…"

"Doesn't he have too much luck on his side?"

Yoon Jong looked at Jo Gul and spoke.

"You think it was luck?"

"…you think it's something else?"

"It isn't luck. It's skill."

Jo Gul titled his head. Yoon Jong started to explain when he saw his companion's confusion.

"It was Chung Myung's skill that gained him the authority to go down to Hua-Um village, that's why he got picked to deliver the letter. What would we have done in that situation? All we could have done was inform our elders of the situation and perform our usual duties in Mount Hua."

"…yeah."

"What's more, there was no guarantee that Elder Hwang would survive his treatment either, but he took a chance because of his skill. If things had gone poorly, Elder Hwang might have died, and Mount Hua would have been ostracized as a sect that tried to take advantage of a wealthy guild only to cause a catastrophe instead. It's a situation in which even the sect leader can't move about recklessly. "

Jo Gul nodded his head. What Yoon Jong said was true.

"Everything looks easy when you see someone else do it. You only realize how difficult something truly is when you must do it yourself. Focus on developing your skills instead of discussing luck. Luck may provide you with opportunities, but if you lack the skill to capitalize on that moment, then it's all a waste."

"Yes, Sahyung."

Jo Gul sighed low.

'Sahyung is starting to nag more and more these days.'

In the past, Yoon Jong was the kind that would step aside from any situation.

Although he was sitting in a symbolic seat as the eldest of the third-class disciples, he wasn't someone outstanding and never tried to make use of his position.

Like water, he would often just go with the flow. Lately, though, he felt more and more like a Sahyung.

He's changed since he decided to achieve something in Mount Hua.

It was the same with Jo Gul.

The others went silent and fell into contemplation at Yoon Jong's words.

However, Yoon Jong's words weren't finished.

"But I am worried."

"About?"

"The process and result were achieved through his skills, but it is also true that his position has increased…”

Chun Myung had already made several contributions to Mount Hua. Now, he made another major one, so what level would his status rise to?

"I am sure that something else is bound to happen."

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"…”

Chung Myung being vicious like a snake isn't the problem here.

The problem was that this vicious person was diligent.

" *Sigh*."

"Just what sin did I commit in my previous life?"

The White Plum Blossom Boarding House was filled with sighs.

"Elder Hwang decided to take over the businesses in Hua-Um."

"We're fortunate."

"If it's Elder Hwang, we can trust him."

Hyun Jong tried to suppress his excitement.

'I am so glad that I can't even make tea!'

It wasn't easy to stabilize his hands, which were trembling in excitement.

Hwang Mun-Yak offered to manage their business without any charge. He even promised a huge amount of compensation, saying that he would repay the favor he had received.

He simply placed two conditions.

Instead of accumulating wealth inside Mount Hua, the money earned would be utilized for the development of Mount Hua.

And the other was to give preference to the third-class disciple, Chung Myung.

The first condition was no problem.

Hyun Jong had no intention of storing the wealth away. Mount Hua wasn't in a

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position where it could leisurely accumulate wealth. They would have to pour money down the well before it would become stable enough to hold water.

The problem was the second condition.

'Preference is too vague of a term.'

It was a natural request to expect from Elder Hwang, Chung Myung had saved his life. As Chung Myung is a disciple of Mount Hua, it can be said that Elder Hwang was repaying the favor by investing in Mount Hua. Yet, he had a special interest in Chung Myung himself.

The problem came from the term 'preferential treatment.'

'What are some ways we can give such treatment to a third-class disciple?'

That was what made Hyung Jong's head hurt.

If he soberly evaluated the achievements made by Chung Myung, it was strange that he hadn't been rewarded properly.

But wasn't Chung Myung already receiving privileges that even the great disciple couldn't have?

'At a time like this… '

Hyun Jong looked at Un Am.

Un Am looked at Hyun Jong too and opened his mouth.

" *Hmm*, this is a good thing."

Un Am drew in the crowd's attention, looked around at them, and continued.

"The reason Elder Hwang asked is because Chung Myung has saved him from a horrible end."

"Well."

"Yes."

"He's such a good child. How does he choose to only do good deeds? Is he a spirit?"

"He's truly on the path of Dao."

"Tell me about it."

" *Hm?* "

Un Am coughed once to gather attention from those talking about the child.

"Then, shouldn't we reward that child again?"

"Well, yes. He should be rewarded."

"He does deserve it."

Everyone nodded.

" *Hmmm*, so what kind of reward do you think would be fine? Let's all give our opinions."

Seeing that things had gone the way he wanted, Hyun Jong smiled.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a disciple that only brings fortune to Mount Hua and receives appropriate rewards in return? Of course, such things were a blessing to Mount Hua.

"Considering that he's a third-class disciple, why not teach him a martial art which he normally couldn't learn as a third-class disciple?"

" *Oh?* "

Hyun Jong looked at Hyun Sang.

This was certainly preferential treatment for the child.

"After I finish studying them, why not let Chung Myung learn the Seven Sages Sword and the Falling Flower Sword? That would certainly make him happy."

"That's a great idea. Sect leader?"

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"I agree."

It was a very warm atmosphere. Hyun Jong smiled and nodded his head.

"Then, as we discussed…"

"No…"

At that moment, someone interrupted Hyun Jong's words.

Hyun Jong slowly turned his gaze and looked at the source of the voice.

Finance head, Hyun Young.

He decried with a face full of anger.

"Sect leader! It makes no sense to give that child this kind of reward!"

' *Ah*, what now!'

This discussion was going to be another pain in the ass.

Although Hyun Jong was the sect leader of Mount Hua, Hyun Young was also an elder and a member of the financial side. He couldn't easily ignore the words of Hyun Young and do what he wanted.

"Finance head, what now?"

"That's your reward? What kind of reward is that?"

" *Huh?* "

"Do you think that if you give that child martial arts, he'll be happy? He's already busy training every day at the dorms, and you want to give him more to learn? That's not a reward; it's punishment!"

What?

What is this?

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Why did it seem like the conversation went in a strange direction?

Amid everyone's confusion, Hyun Young looked at them with fire blazing in his eyes.

"That is no reward! A reward must be something that you give another person wholeheartedly. What kind of reward is this!? When you give a reward, it needs to be significant enough to feel a certain reluctance to part with it! Do you understand what I'm talking about?"

What was this man even saying?

Hyun Jong looked at Hyun Young with eyes that were full of bewilderment as he couldn't figure out what was happening. Wasn't Hyun Young the one who hated Chung Myung's the most and said he had to be punished at all costs in the previous meeting?

Why did he suddenly change his position?

At last, an excitable voice erupted from Hyun Young's mouth.

"Do you think this is some normal contribution!? Thanks to that child, Elder Hwang was saved, and the money is flowing into Mount Hua—No, Mount Hua is being supported! Elder Hwang even said that he would even manage the businesses for free… FOR FREE!"

Only then did Hyun Jong understand why this was happening.

Hyun Young was the head of finances.

Someone who had to take care of the maintenance of Mount Hua. To put it bluntly, it was a position that needed to manage the money within Mount Hua.

Really, it could be expressed in one word,

HELL

How horrible must it have been to manage the finances for a ruined sect? However, thanks to him, Mount Hua was able to survive until now.

'No more.'

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There was no one willing to aid a ruined sect, and debtors kept coming to collect.

Then, when the situation became dire, Chung Myung solved the problem.

Although a large chest of money was found, money would disappear quickly once it found a use.

What the finance head wanted wasn't money, which would run out when used, but stable income, which could be invested each month with the businesses running well.

How happy must he be? After all, Chung Myung saved Elder Hwang, the person Mount Hua needed the most in order to steer them towards the best outcome. From his perspective, he would support Chung Myung even if he needed to wait on him hand and foot for over a month.

Hyun Young was red when he shouted.

"Give him a proper reward! That way, he will bring more nice things to us!"

"A reward isn't an investment to earn back later…"

"Anyway!"

Hyun Young, who was excited, even stopped Hyun Jong from speaking.

"Sect leader! That child, he is a God! He's the God of Wealth! You need to give him a proper reward and keep using him to earn more money! Do you get it! *Huh?* "

"…"

"Do you know just how much money he's earned this time? All these other idiots are gathered here, but not a single one among them has even brought in a penny! Such bastards! But this child is a wonderful bastard! Right? Do you understand? Say yes?"

Hyun Sang got up from his seat and then hugged Hyun Young from behind and started pulling him out of the room.

"Sect leader! Reward him right! A huge reward!"

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As he was dragged out, Hyun Jong sighed.

"I hope you all understand. He's gone through some tough times."

“…we understand."

"Actually, there isn't anything we can do. Considering the hardship that he's endured."

"How difficult must it have been…”

"Sect leader."

Un Am cleared the atmosphere and spoke.

"Finance head is right. Chung Myung needs to be rewarded properly. I especially like the idea of giving him what he really deserves."

"Well, that's right."

"If we look at this situation calmly, Chung Myung's achievements this time cannot be compared to what he did previously."

Hyun Jong nodded his head.

"But last time, it was pure coincidence. So, the disciples will also try to see what kind of reward Chung Myung receives this time."

"Yes."

"I want Chung Myung to be given a proper reward so that all disciples understand that those who achieve great deeds for Mount Hua will be awarded appropriately."

Everyone nodded their heads, and Hyun Jong said.

"Then, what should be the reward?"

No one could answer.

"First of all…”

It was Un Am who spoke.

"He likes going down Mount Hua, so I think it might be good to have him be our liaison with the Eunha Guild."

"But wouldn't that just be turning him into an errand boy? Is that even a reward?"

"Elder Hwang is fond of Chung Myung, so he will treat him favorably each time."

" *Ah*, that is true."

Hyun Jong nodded his head. It was a good idea.

As soon as one opinion came out, the others began to express their thoughts as well.

"Why not give him a Plum Blossom Sword in advance? Wouldn't the child like that?"

"What use would the Plum Blossom Sword be to a child who still trains with a wooden sword? Why not give him a new uniform? Embroidered with golden thread."

"What's the point of wearing gold-lined threads when food is scarce? Let's just give him something to eat or let him take something from the library."

"Do you think Chung Myung is like you! You think we should just give him food as a reward?"

"Then we'll give him pills!"

"There are no pills in Mount Hua!"

"Then buy some! We have money!"

It was then.

Thud!

Hyun Young kicked the door open and shouted.

"Just give him money! What are you all racking your heads for when we have money to give! You frustrating old bastard! Shut up and give him money for… *um! Um! Um!* "

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Hyun Sang covered Hyun Young's mouth and dragged him out again with an awkward smile.

Tak!

"…"

"…”

"…”

Hyun Jong closed his eyes.

'It is true that good things have constantly been happening lately… '

But the more Mount Hua grew, the stranger it became.

Maybe it was just his imagination?

Hwang Mun-Yak sat opposite Chun Myung and sipped his tea.

Chung Myung frowned slightly as he looked at Elder Hwang.

It was Hwang Mun-Yak who began the conversation.

“How is it?”

“You say the strangest things from time to time.”

“There is nothing wrong with asking.”

Hwang Mun-Yak’s eyes shone as he gauged Chung Myung’s reaction. He felt a subtle sense of incongruity as he looked at Chung Myung.

‘I, Hwang Mun-Yak, am speaking on equal footing with a child like this?’

It wasn’t a matter of arrogance, but considering what Hwang Mun-Yak had achieved in life, sitting like this with a third-class disciple would usually be unthinkable.

Nevertheless, Hwang Mun-Yak was now alone with Chung Myung. Not as a benefactor who saved his life, but simply because he wanted to deal with Mount Hua’s third-class disciple, Chung Myung.

“Aren’t we in the same boat now?”

“Boat…”

Chung Myung smiled brightly.

“It was luck that I saved Elder Hwang. Being on the same boat is a bit too much.”

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“I have no desire to be on the same boat as Mount Hua.”

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes and looked at Elder Hwang.

‘Look at him?’

Isn’t he being a bit too honest?

“To be precise, without you, Mount Hua is of no interest to me.”

“You are overestimating my worth.”

Hwang Mun-Yak curled his lips at Chung Myung’s modesty.

“Young disciple. I am a merchant. I have been a merchant all my life, and I will be one until the day I die. As a merchant, the only weapon I possess is my eye for people.”

“…”

“If my eyes were wrong, I would have already been in ruin. Even if I have merely been lucky enough to avoid failure till now, I would surely fail one day. There is nothing more upsetting or regrettable than that, but if my eyes are correct…”

Hwang Mun-Yak looked at Chung Myung.

“Wouldn’t good fortune be in the future for both Eunha and Mount Hua?”

Chung Myung lightly scratched his cheek.

“Well, don’t say anything about being on the same boat. I’m not fond of such phrases.”

“Why?”

“People who speak such words are often the first ones to put a knife in others’

backs.”

Things like this happened in the past.

Countless people praised and shed tears for Chung Myung and Mount Hua as they

went to save the world. But none of them had shown kindness to Mount Hua in the end.

So how could he like these words now?

“I don’t like such phrases either. From a merchant’s perspective, a boat is something you can get on and off at any time.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“But.”

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled.

“Although, if our destination is the same, then there is no need to get off the boat.

After all, if both parties row the boat together, won’t it be easier to reach our destination?”

“*Hmm.* ”

Chung Myung looked at Hwang Mun-Yak with serious eyes.

“Yes. There is nothing wrong about that.”

Hwang Mun-Yak’s eyes shone.

‘I am sure.’

He confirmed this.

It didn’t matter what the outcome of this conversation would be. It would be great if Chung Myung would cooperate, but even if he didn’t, as long as the negotiations with the sect leader were completed, Eunha Guild would support and take advantage of Mount Hua.

Nevertheless, Hwang Mun-Yak wanted to speak privately with Chung Myung to confirm this point.

‘In this child’s head, Mount Hua is already developing. He has already determined that Mount Hua will develop, without fail.’

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What tremendous confidence.

However, this self-confidence didn’t feel like it came from simple child-like pride, ignorant of the world. Rather, a sense of senility could be felt from Chung Myung.

“Young disciple.”

“Yes.”

“The Eunha Merchant Guild will do its best to support Mount Hua. You know what that means, don’t you?”

“What, you are breaking up with the Southern Edge Sect?”

“That’s right.”

“I think it is a bit disrespectful to expect a reward for something we didn’t request from you.”

“I want nothing in return. I just want you to know.”

“Yeah. Sure…”

‘You just wanted to let me know, sure.’

It wouldn’t cost a thing.

“I’ll be sure to come and visit you often in the future.”

“Yes. Sect leader said that if there was a need to send someone to Eunha, I’d be the one to go.”

“That’s quite the good news. I hope to see and speak with you soon. *Haha*.”

“Yes, of course. *Hahaha.* ”

Both people chuckled at the same time and looked at each other.

In their hearts, both had completely different thoughts.

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‘This quick-witted little prick!’

‘How dare you try and take advantage of me. I’ve handled countless fools like you in my past life!’

They were facing each other with smiles, but sparks were flowing between them.

“Young disciple.”

“Yes?”

“This is the gamble of my life.”

“That’s something a young man should say.”

“Well, I think I’ve gained a new life after you helped me. It wouldn’t hurt to bet on a new life.”

“But you don’t really care about that.”

“Perhaps I just wanted to say it then.”

Hwang Mun-Yak stood up. Then he looked at Chung Myung.

“I will only say one word of advice in return for saving my life.”

“Yes.”

“Young disciple. You certainly are excellent. Even if you searched every crevice of the world twice over, you might not find someone more capable at your age.”

“Thank you for your kind words.”

Do you want to find a person like Chung Myung? It’s not just those his age; there’s absolutely nobody like him in the entire world!

Who else could come back from the dead like him?

“But I think that young disciple needs to stay hidden a little longer. The world is a scary place. All sorts of ghouls and ghosts dance around, and there are many demons

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around us. As soon as you reveal yourself, they’ll rush towards you.”

Chung Myung had a bitter smile.

“You speak too highly of me; I am just a kid.”

“I told you all that I wanted to say. Okay then.”

Hwang Mun-Yak turned around and walked away.

“*Ah*, one minute.”

“Yes?”

Hwang Mun-Yak turned around again; Chung Myung had a subtle smile on his face.

“I need you to find out a few things for me. Could you please help me out?”

Hwang Mun-Yak also had a subtle smile as he nodded.

“Sure.”

Tak!

Hwang Mun-Yak closed the door behind him and Hwang Jongi, who was waiting, approached him.

“Did you have a good conversation, father?”

“How did the discussions with the village below the mountain go?”

“From today on, we have decided to place subordinates within Hua-Um. If we support and distribute the goods, we will be able to stabilize the businesses before ten days are up.”

“That’s quite long.”

Hwang Mun-Yak said.

“Even if you take a loss, settle the matter within three days. Now isn’t the time to

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pursue profit. We need to show our abilities here.”

“Yes.”

Hwang Jongi couldn’t hide his curiosity and asked again.

“The young disciple is…?”

“… *Hm*.”

Hwang Mun-Yak glanced back at the door he had left behind with a subtle expression.

‘That child is a monster!’

He couldn’t understand what that child was thinking. Even though he took on a child-like appearance, Hwang Mun-Yak began to doubt whether even that was real or fake.

“Mount Hua…”

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled.

“I’d rather call this place the Dragon’s Lair.”

“*Uh?* ”

“Nothing. Let’s move.”

Hwang Mun-Yak walked out whistling.

Dragon Lair.

Where a dragon lives. There was no need to guess who the dragon was.

“Jongi.”

“Yes, father.”

“I’ve changed my mind. Maybe we should put everything on the line in Mount Hua.”

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“…”

Hwang Mun-Yak was strangely excited.

Merchants don’t live on money but information. Money was just the result of utilizing the information in the proper manner.

He realized before anyone else that a dragon resided in Mount Hua. This information was so great that even Hwang Mun-Yak couldn’t estimate its value.

‘If I use this information well, the Eunha Merchant Guild might very well rise to the top of the world!’

It won’t be easy, but wasn’t this worth a try?

“There must be a lot of work to do. Let’s go now.”

Hwang Jongi silently followed his father, unable to understand the situation.

At the small hill behind White Plum Blossom Hall, a pair of eyes were watching them.

“*Uh*.”

Chung Myung watched the two adults as they set off from Mount Hua.

“That old man just doesn’t quit.”

Dealing with Hwang Mun-Yak was different from dealing with Hyun Jong or the other elders of Mount Hua. Of course, the elders of Mount Hua were diligent and wise, but they were Taoists who lived their lives away from the real world.

Hwang Mun-Yak lived in the secular world his entire life, so he was a lot more calculating.

“Whatever, it all worked out.”

He was able to solve the issue. Hwang Mun-Yak would continue to help Mount Hua in the future.

The weakest part of Mount Hua has been bolstered.

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Wealth?

No.

Hwang Mun-Yak will make sure that Mount Hua’s name is heard around the world once again. Since Mount Hua is a martial arts sect, it was necessary for them to claim their identity in the right way.

Chung Myung looked up at the blue sky and grinned.

“Well, one problem is solved, Sahyung! How was that? Do you think I did well?”

The visage of Chung Myung’s Sahyung could be seen smiling down at him from among the clouds.

As if to say,

‘You idiot. It serves you right! Now, do you understand how hard it is?’

That was what that old man seemed to be saying.

“This is still the first step.”

There was a long way to go.

Mount Hua’s biggest obstacle has been overcome, there was no immediate concern remaining that the sect would vanish, and they had even gained a fair bit of wealth.

With that problem solved, the next focus would be their martial arts.

If the Southern Edge Sect has lost their identity and forgotten their roots, then what about Mount Hua, which doesn’t even have roots? He had to restore Mount Hua’s martial arts back to their peak.

Chung Myung raised his body up.

“*Ugh*. When will the kids grow up!?”

Looking down at Mount Hua, the scene seemed to leave him feeling pleased. Even though it was only a little, Mount Hua had begun to change.

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Chung Myung laid down again.

“Sahyung, Sahyung. I should have listened more to Sahyung’s constant nagging. Now I understand Sahyung’s worries.”

Chung Myung closed his eyes.

He could envision the old days when he hid away from his Sahyung as he chased after Chung Myung, ready to discipline him.

His appearance had changed, but so did the years.

Mount Hua is Mount Hua.

Right. It was still Mount Hua.

It was a day when the long winter had passed, and the first spring plum blossoms bloomed in Mount Hua.

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The power of the Eunha Merchant Guild was genuinely shocking.

The people of the Eunha Guild showed that they could stabilize and overhaul the Hua-Um businesses within a short few days. A feat that Mount Hua was unable to do despite using all their disciples.

Thanks to that, a buddha-like smile wouldn’t leave Hyun Young’s face as he strolled around.

Most of the time, that smiling face would lead to…

“Have you eaten?”

“Yes, Elder.”

“Good, good.”

Hyun Young patted Chung Myung's hair with a loving smile more benevolent than anyone else. Honey seemed to drip from his eyes.

"Eat a lot. Eat a lot and go somewhere else to earn more good things."

"…What?"

"No, I mean, raise Mount Hua's reputation."

"…"

The third-class disciples were all stunned in shock. Hyun Young, who was normally like a venomous serpent, laughed and stroked someone's hair.

Chung Myung felt like a sacrificial lamb being fed before the date of its killing.

'I feel like I'm being trained indirectly.'

Hyun Jong and now even Hyun Young were all smiles. They were so happy that youthful black hair had begun sprouting under the years of gray!

'They must be quite old.'

Although they looked young for their age, considering that they were distinguished martial artists, they still seemed far too worn and withered. Those who had suffered so much during the prime of their lives now had a massive burden lifted off their shoulders.

Hua-Um settled down, and the elders regained their laughter.

Time began to flow like water.

The disciples of Mount Hua also embraced the flow of time, feeling the stability that came to Mount Hua for the first time in decades.

And while everyone was enjoying such a peaceful life, the third-class disciples were dying.

“*Ahhhhh!* ”

“*Oh*, myyyyyyy God!”

The third-class disciples, carrying stones the size of a human body, moved their tired bodies as sweat poured like rain from them. And did push-ups with all kinds of screams.

“*Ackkkkk!* ”

“M-My waist…”

However, there was one thing that was different. The swearing, which used to be directed at Chun Myung, has been replaced with cries of agony.

“I am dying!”

“You won’t die. You made it this far without dying. Straighten your back!”

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“No, I am really going to die…!”

“You just have to do it two more times. Now, this is the last one. Once more! Okay!

This is the last one!”

“*Acck!* ”

With another push-up somehow completed, one of the disciples gasped and cried.

“A-Are we going to die like this?”

“You aren’t going to die. Nobody has died yet.”

“… *Ack*.”

At first, they just started their training because Chung Myung asked them to… well, more like forced them to. They started this training to avoid missing their meals or being beaten.

However, after repeating this for several months, they realized something.

‘This works.’

No, it’s not enough to say it works. To be precise, it changed everything. At first, they could only endure this training because of the pill Chung Myung gave them, but now they could feel the effects of their training all throughout their bodies.

First, their lower body was rigid and stable; their swords would no longer waver.

Also, their stamina had gone up, and their entire body felt alive and energetic.

Even though they were previously unmotivated, they all had a martial artist’s spirit at the end of the day. Weren’t martial artists the sort of people who would become motivated once they recognized their own growth? They wouldn’t even hesitate to chew a living snake if it meant improving themselves.

Who would complain if all it took to improve their condition was simply lifting some stones?

The screaming voices increased as the training carried on, and over time the disciples, who used to carry bags of sand, were now lifting heavy stones.

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The most notable of which was Jo Gul.

"*Ahhhh!*"

Jo Gul lifted a rock twice as large as the others. Seeing that, everyone bit their tongues.

"Is he doing this without using internal qi?"

"Seems like it."

The way they spoke changed. It was only a few months, but they had all grown a bit taller, and their shoulders widened.

Jo Gul had changed so much that people would blink twice before recognizing him.

He used to be on the smaller end of the third-class disciples but was now taller with a solid muscular frame.

Yoon Jong looked at the shocked disciples and smiled.

'It's a strange thing.'

When they first started training, Yoon Jong held a lot of worries within his chest.

Basically, Mount Hua's sword is a swift one. Mount Hua's sword style was to pressure the opponent through myriad changes based on the speed and tempo of the user.

That's why Yoon Jong initially thought this training method, of simply increasing strength, would interfere with Mount Hua's sword arts.

Somehow, their swords seemed twice as sharp since their training began to bear results.

Thanks to that, they achieved a new level of understanding of the sword arts they had been taught.

Viewing their swordsmanship in a different light, they were now learning the Falling Flower Sword.

It was a little tricky, but Yoon Jong was more than satisfied with it.

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The Falling Flower Sword and Seven Star Step differed from what they learned before. The deeper they delved, the more mysterious the techniques seemed. They were martial arts which convinced them that they would become stronger once they mastered them.

So, they were all excited.

'One more!'

"*Uhhhhh!* "

"*Acckkkkkk!* "

"Wow, your bodies are getting so big that your swords seem like chopsticks!"

“*Hehe*. Please! Bring me another sandbag!”

Yoon Jong couldn’t help but feel like the disciples of Mount Hua were becoming more like a den of bandits.

It was indelible to see the fragile disciples gradually turning into hulking muscular beasts.

“Sahyung. It’s time to eat!”

“Yes.”

In the past, everyone looked forward to the end of the training, but now they each set their own training plans and push themselves harder, often training overtime on their own.

It was Yoon Jong’s role to manage their plans so that the disciples wouldn’t be overtrained.

“Now, let’s head inside. We should wash up, eat, and get ready for morning practice too.”

“Yes, Sahyung.”

“First, finish what you were doing.”

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“*Um*, yes.”

Yoon Jong was looking around and glanced at Jo Gul.

“But where is Chung Myung?”

“He hasn’t been coming to training much lately, right?”

“Yes.”

Since the third-class disciples became more motivated to train by themselves, Chung Myung didn’t join in with them as often.

“It’s not like he is sleeping either; he wakes up before anyone else. So where is he even going?”

“How could we even know? Actually, isn’t Chung Myung the busiest person in Mount Hua right now?”

“…Yeah.”

It was true.

After a series of events, Mount Hua was revived. Visitors, who had never come to Mount Hua before, began to frequent the sect, and the businesses recovered from Hua-Um had been re-integrated, so the sect was steadily earning money.

Following that, Mount Hua itself was even being renovated, with maintenance laborers also coming and going constantly.

In the meantime, Chung Myung was moving back and forth between the Eunha Guild and Mount Hua.

“Sahyung.”

“*Hm?* ”

“How strong do you think we are?”

“Well.”

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Yoon Jong tilted his head.

Strength is relative. In order to know how strong they were now, they had to understand their past strength. But they didn't really have a standard to measure by.

They only knew that they had gotten stronger, but it was difficult to judge how strong they became since they were all growing together.

"Wouldn't I be at least twice as strong as my past self?"

"Only twice as strong?"

"I don't know. It's a bit abstract. What's certain is that I'm confident that I could defeat at least three of my former self."

"That isn't enough."

"*Huh?* "

"You know. The conference is coming up."

At that, Yoon Jong frowned.

"Yes."

"We need to get much stronger."

"…right."

Yoon Jong smiled bitterly.

"Let's ask Chung Myung to give us some new training."

Jo Gul resolutely nodded with a sullen expression.

"What do I do now?"

Chung Myung headed towards the mountain's peak. To become strong, he had to

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train.

Chung Myung had achieved perfect synchronization between his body and sword in the past. With the memories of his former life, he was able to somewhat reach similar results with his current body, but he hadn't been able to accomplish perfect body and sword unification like he had in the past.

There was no shortcut here. He must constantly swing his sword to resolve the dissonance felt between body, mind, and sword.

However, the problem was that Chung Myung couldn't do this in front of others. If he were to train properly in front of others, their entire worldview would be flipped upside-down, and it would draw unnecessary attention to himself.

"Yep, I would rather die than suffer!"

So, he chose to practice in a location beyond the prying eyes of others.

These days, Chung Myung climbs the mountain at dawn, swings his sword on the peak, and then comes down.

'How am I supposed to do this?'

There was no problem climbing the mountain; the problem was that it wasted a lot of time.

'I don't have enough time to spend like this.'

He had to keep an eye on the third-class disciples, manage the businesses down in Hua-Um together with the Eunha Guild, and gently appease the sect's elders, who sometimes act strangely.

But more importantly, he was sure of one thing.

'I don't have the time to relax.'

If he was given 100 years, then Chung Myung would someday enter the realm of the Plum Blossom Sword Saint and naturally become stronger than his past self. As Chung Myung gets stronger, Mount Hua will naturally get stronger too.

But the world isn't such an easy place.

There are bound to be people who will target Mount Hua; they will do anything to become stronger even without a specific goal in mind. Because a sect that flourishes will be seen as competition to be stifled and snuffed out.

Somewhere down the line, interference will appear, and people will come to pick a fight.

What if he takes his sweet time to train and ends up encountering an enemy he can't defeat?

Besides, doesn't Mount Hua already have a lot of enemies?

Chung Myung shook his head.

'I need to get stronger as soon as possible. I can only handle so much.'

Chung Myung couldn’t afford to neglect his training. He had to climb as quickly as he could. Lying and waiting wouldn’t make him stronger; he would have to clench his teeth and work hard…

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

Someone was here.

An uninvited guest appeared at the location Chung Myung had trained for the past month.

‘Who would be here at this time…?’

He cautiously approached the peak and peered at the figure that was wielding their sword in the moonlight.

The tip of the sword drew a smooth line through the night sky.

Soft but powerful. Flashy but elegant.

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The sword which rose from the ground embroidered the sky and slowly descended like falling flower petals.

An elegant sword dance.

It was a dark dawn before the sun had even begun to rise. A woman was performing a sword dance under the moonlit night sky.

Her white robe, ebony hair, and silver sword shone in the moonlight.

“Like a moon under a moon…”

Chung Myung was engrossed in her dance.

The mysterious woman's sword appeared to melt into the moonlight.

Fragile, yet unshakable. The sword seemed like a Plum Blossom. Right. The old sword of Mount Hua.

Chung Myung fell into a bizarre state of fascination.

The ancient sword arts of Mount Hua, which he thought he would never see in this era, were unfolding in front of him.

It wasn't a question of what swordsmanship they chose to master; it was a question of what it meant to wield the sword at all.

Yes, like…

"Who's there!?"

A sharp voice interrupted his concentration as the woman rushed toward him.

' *Huh?* '

The woman quickly appeared in front of Chung Myung and sharply stabbed her sword.

"*Uh?* "

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A fierce sword lightly touched Chung Myung's neck.

Chung Myung sighed lightly, staring blankly at the sword on his neck.

'I would be better off dead!'

How could he let a child catch him off guard? His reputation as the Plum Blossom Sword Saint is over.

“Who are you? I don’t remember seeing someone like you here before?”

‘That’s what I want to say!’

Who the hell is this woman?

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The woman stared at Chung Myung with cold eyes.

In the meantime, Chung Myung managed to understand a couple things about the person before him.

First, this woman belonged to Mount Hua.

She had Mount Hua’s pattern engraved on the chest of her uniform to prove it. Only the disciples of Mount Hua could wear this.

Second.

‘ *Tch*. Any man would be mesmerized by her.’

She is pretty.

In his previous life, Chung Myung had been all around the world. To remain un-swayed by mortal pleasures and always maintain a stable mind was what the Dao was all about. However, it was impossible for

Chung Myung, who was famous for being a delinquent master of Mount Hua, to remain stuck in one city for very long.

It had been the same before he rose to fame. He was someone who would hit the people from the other sects constantly.

After that, he struggled very hard to raise the reputation of Mount Hua through a cooperative effort and beat up everyone who tried to cheat him or Mount Hua.

Right. Even in the old days, he proved that Mount Hua's sword was the best in the world by defeating the masters from all the famous sects.

Of course, it wasn't intentional.

'They always started it.'

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It wasn't Chung Myung's duty to develop Mount Hua's reputation. That was the role left to the elders of the sect. However, the role somehow became linked to Chung Myung and his Sahyung. Thanks to that, Chung Myung was dragged around all over the place.

Even then, he had rarely witnessed a woman as beautiful as this mysterious disciple in front of him. Although, there was a feeling like a flower that hadn't yet fully bloomed, making him wonder how it would look when it finally blooms someday.

Ebony hair, eyebrows, pure white skin, and perfectly clear, large eyes were impressive.

If Chung Myung had been a child with no experience, he might have been overwhelmed by this beauty by now.

The problem was that Chung Myung was an old man who suffered and saw too much of this world to be swayed by mere beauty.

“Who are you?”

“A human.”

“…”

The sword moved closer to his throat.

Ah! Shit! She doesn’t know how to joke!

“Mount Hua’s uniform.”

Her gaze fell on the chest of Chung Myung as he spoke.

“I don’t remember seeing your face. Who are you?”

“It’s my first time seeing you here too.”

The woman narrowed her eyes.

“A third-class disciple?”

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“Yes.”

“Third-class disciples aren’t allowed to go outside the sect gate after sunset.”

“I’m exempt from that rule.”

“…What?”

“The sect leader gave me permission.”

Chung Myung's brazen retort added a chill to the woman's face.

"The sect leader?"

"Yes."

"To a third-class disciple?"

"Yes."

"A lie."

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders without answering.

"Go and confirm it yourself. Do you think that a disciple of Mount Hua would lie using the sect leader's name?"

The woman's eyes slightly shook. She seemed to believe there was some truth in those words.

"So put this sword away first. It might hurt someone."

"…"

The woman lowered her sword. She couldn't confirm if Chung Myung's words were genuine or not, but she couldn't continue to threaten him after he used the sect leader's name.

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"It's wrong to watch other people's training."

"This is where I regularly trained until yesterday, but then someone I don't know suddenly appeared. If I can't investigate and determine

who they are, then what do you think I should do?”

“You should have come out the moment you noticed someone.”

“A stranger I’ve never seen before suddenly appears near Mount Hua, and you want me to reveal myself without determining their intentions?”

The woman gently bit her lip. Her white face turned a slight shade of red; it seemed like she couldn’t argue back.

‘She isn’t very good with words.’

Her sword was sharp, but not her tongue, apparently. With a face like that, she likely didn’t get dragged into many fights.

‘Such a disgusting world.’

Good-looking people live such comfortable lives.

“What is your name?”

“Chung Myung.”

“You received a name from the sect?”

“No. My name is Chung Myung.”

“…a third-class disciple needs to have Chung attached. But it isn’t a sect name; it’s your own name?”

“Yes. Even if the sect gives me a name, I will keep it as Chung Myung.”

“Ah…”

Shit. This woman was dumb.

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“I am Yu Yiseol.”

“Okay.”

Yu Yiseol stared at Chung Myung without saying a word.

“What is it?”

“I’m a second-class disciple, I am Baek, and I am your senior.”

Huh?

Chung Myung titled his head.

‘There were people of Baek?’

No, of course there were. Mount Hua names each generation of disciples as such: Chung, Myung, Hyung, Un, Baek.

It was natural for someone to have the title of Baek. Then, the next title after Baek would return to Chung, like a circle.

In other words, it was normal for there to be disciples who were named Baek after the seniors named Un.

‘I just didn’t see any of them, so I forgot about it.’

The naming is done right away based on their age since problems can arise if there are age differences among the disciples. Therefore, depending on circumstances, sometimes a name gets skipped too.

Since Mount Hua’s situation was so complex, he thought that a couple names were skipped, but there was someone with Baek?

“It is the first time I’m hearing about this.”

“You are the youngest of Mount Hua, right?”

“Yes, right.”

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“Didn’t your sahyungs tell you?”

“*Uh*… well…”

There was no way that his sahyungs, whom he constantly bossed around, would ever volunteer such information to him.

‘It’s my fault.’

Chung Myung, who was easily convinced, nodded his head.

“There must have been some misunderstanding. What could be done?”

Someone with the Baek name appeared. From Chung Myung’s point of view, a few more pieces were added to Mount Hua’s board.

“Is that the end?”

“What?”

“What about your greeting?”

Chung Myung’s face contorted.

‘I don’t get it. What is this brat saying in front of this old man!?’

Being young is a sin! It really is a horrible sin!

“Yes. Nice to meet you.”

Chung Myung roughly greeted her with a voice holding no emotion.

‘Go away now.’

He had to train, too. He didn’t want to waste the day just because someone else occupied his training place! The sun was about to rise too!

“…what a weird kid.”

Who?

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‘Me?’

Yu Yiseol started at Chung Myung and spoke with a chilly voice.

“I am going to check with the sect leader to see if what you are saying is the truth. If you lied, you had better be prepared for the consequences.”

Chung Myung replied.

“By all means, go.”

“…”

Yu Yiseol started at Chung Myung without a word for a long time and slightly shook her head.

“Really weird.”

“…”

Chung Myung wanted to spit those words back at her.

With her sword sheathed, the girl glanced once more at Chung Myung and began to descend. As her figure disappeared in the distance, Chung Myung sighed as he gazed at the rising sun.

“*Ah*, my fate.”

Being treated like a child was horrible.

“And my training time is also over!”

He could still train if he wanted to, but his mind was going through so many questions he was certain that it would only be a waste of time.

‘Whenever I train, it ends up like this. So much time is wasted just going up and down the mountain.’

Chung Myung bit his lip.

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Maybe it was time to find another training ground?

“What’s with this atmosphere?”

Chung Myung tilted his head as he looked at the disciples having their meal.

It was the first time after Chung Myung thoroughly beat everyone that such a dark and gloomy air lingered about. He never thought he would have to see this, which was why he was confused.

“You’re here?”

Yoon Jong waved to him and called him over.

Chung Myung took his meal and went to the table where Yoon Jong and Jo Gul were seated and asked as soon as he sat down.

“What’s with this mood?”

“…our seniors are back.”

“The Baek bastards?”

“*Oh?* You know them?”

“…”

Chung Myung had lived his whole life in Mount Hua, you idiot!

“Anyway, so what? What’s wrong with them coming back?”

“First of all, don’t call the Baek disciples’ Baek.’ It’ll get complicated if they hear you say that. we might be scolded too.”

“Me? Or you?”

“… *Ah*, I need to think about that.”

Yoon Jong had a wry smile.

“The seniors have been in closed-door training away from Mount Hua. In the past, their training centers weren’t well maintained, so they couldn’t do any large-scale closed-door training here.”

“So, they went to another sect to train?’

“…not exactly. I don’t think they went just anywhere.”

“Anyway, so what? What about them is making these kids so gloomy? Do they have bad personalities? Do they bully and beat the other disciples?”

“Unlike someone else, the seniors don’t beat us.”

“I wonder who that ‘someone else’ you’re referring to is.”

“…Let’s move on.”

Yoon Jong was flustered when Chung Myung called him out, but Jo Gul quickly took the lead to change the subject.

“It’s because of the conference.”

“What? Isn’t a conference just for meetings?”

“No, this is the Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect’s conference.”

“What’s that?”

Jo Gul sighed.

“Once in a while, both the sects come together. Now, we have a competition every two years to compare each sect’s achievements against one another.”

“*Ah*, I feel like I heard about this somewhere… When did this start?”

“Don’t know. I know that it’s been happening for a long time.”

Yoon Jong said,

“I heard that the first conference was organized to occur once every five years. Back then, the goal was to foster friendship between both sects. That changed little by little over time, and it’s now become an event where the second and third-class disciples get together and compete in the name of their sects.”

“Compete?”

“Don’t say it’s to compete…”

The answer came from elsewhere.

“It’s called being beaten one-sidedly.”

“Even now, where I got hit still hurts.”

“How can we survive again this time? After seeing what happened, even the seniors went to train for our sake. This is so crazy.”

Looking around, Chung Myung sighed.

“*Ah*. Since the elders fighting would cause trouble, they push the fighting onto the second and third-class disciples? And we have been beaten all this time?”

“Right. To avoid repeat suffering of our past humiliation, the seniors went into closed room training and only just got back. In other words, the time of the conference is drawing near.”

“Is that so?’

Chung Myung’s lips curled into a smile.

“Well, we’re going to compete with the Southern Edge sect, huh?”

The Southern Edge sect?

That one?

Whether he wanted to or not, each situation lately only made Chung Myung hate the Southern Edge Sect more.

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In the past, there was a bit of pity, but after knowing that they copied Mount Hua's sword technique, Chung Myung couldn't even sleep in peace!

"Competition…"

In the past, such things never happened.

At that time, Mount Hua was the best, and the Southern Edge Sect wasn't great, so such things didn't happen.

But now that Mount Hua was weak, were those bastards trying to use these claims of friendship to promote their strength?

It wasn't even funny to hear.

'A friendly meeting with Mount Hua?'

Chung Myung's eyes shone.

No matter how lame Mount Hua is now, it was Chung Myung's child. Only he had the right to destroy it, not some other sect.

"And those second-class bastards!"

"Chung Myung, please. They are seniors; just call them seniors. Please."

"Fine. Then those senior bastards!"

"…"

“Are they sure they can win?”

“…that’s a bit…”

Yoon Jong couldn’t readily answer. Closed-room training was meant to focus on the parts that a disciple lacked, but it was difficult to guarantee how strong they had gotten. Also, despite their achievements, winning still seemed like a distant dream.

“Then.”

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Chung Myung gritted his teeth.

“Then we need to win!”

“What?”

“Sahyungs! Are you ready to do anything to win? Even take poison!? Or break your limbs and bodies!? If you can do something to beat those bastards and make a name for Mount Hua, you are all prepared to die, right!”

No, that doesn’t sound right…

Wasn’t Chung Myung pushing it too far?

“Don’t worry! I’ll make you win! I’ll turn you all into the best!”

Well, this man never really followed the path of Dao.

‘Just go to the Green Forest Mountain and turn into one of their bandits already. Why is he even here?’

Well, this is a mountain too.

Haha.

Hahahah!

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“The second-class disciples are coming back.”

“*Hmm.* ”

Hyung Jong sighed heavily.

It was good to hear that the children who left for closed room training were returning, but it was unpleasant to think about what would happen soon afterward.

“How far away are they?”

“Some seem to have already reached Hua-Um village, and some are yet to arrive.”

“I see.”

Hyun Jong raised his head and looked at Un Am.

“Sect leader.”

“Speak.”

“Why was the conference being held so soon? Wasn’t it originally scheduled to be held in half a year?”

“The Southern Edge Sect sent us a letter requesting it. This time they wanted to hold it earlier.”

“Can’t we ask them to postpone it?”

“That’ll be difficult.”

Un Am sighed.

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“Mount Hua is in high spirits right now. Everything is going well, and we can live without worrying about food or our stability. Everyone is smiling brightly. Compared to a few months ago, it’s a remarkable change.”

“Yes.”

Hyun Jong agreed.

The most significant difference was that Mount Hua was full of energy now.

Those who once lived without knowing what tomorrow would bring finally saw the faintest glimmer of hope. The children’s smiling faces brought warmth to the hearts of the sect leader and other elders.

“But, we are still a martial arts sect.”

“Yes.”

“We did recently rediscover some of our lost martial arts from the books that were found, but it isn’t yet the time to see results.”

Hyun Jong nodded without saying anything. What Un Am was saying was correct.

Mount Hua could overwhelm the Southern Edge Sect in the past, but now Mount Hua wasn't great. Only recently did they find their lost martial arts and gain new hope.

'That too, just a small glimmer of hope.'

They had a long way to go.

Now, they were able to survive and solve their financial woes. However, to regain their former fame and glory, they would need to regain their former martial might.

But could martial arts be learned overnight?

Absolutely not.

"If the conference ends in the same result as before, I'm worried that the disciples will lose their newfound hope and turn into defeatists with no motivation."

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"Un Am."

"…yes. Sect leader."

"Do you think I don't know that?"

Hyun Jong shook his head and continued.

"Would avoiding it or pushing it away make any difference? If we avoid it, will it quell the disciples' doubts and produce positive results? This would have to happen one way or the other. If I ask to postpone it, then wouldn't the disciples believe that their own sect leader lacks faith in them?"

“That…”

Un Am bowed his head.

“There is no shame in losing. If you lose despite your best efforts, it is unavoidable.

They will simply have to work harder next time. But delaying the conference to avoid a loss is something we should never do.”

“I was short-sighted, sect leader.”

“I fully understand your concern. But… it would be difficult to postpone this conference for many reasons.”

Un Am sighed.

‘I ended up saying something useless and disturbed the sect leader’s mind.’

In such times, Un Am always wanted to be of help to the sect leader.

“Really, wouldn’t it be nice if the second-class disciples can achieve good results?”

“Right.”

Both Un Am and Hyun Jong knew that wasn’t an easy task.

The Southern Edge Sect was once under their feet, but now the gap between the two sects is unimaginably wide. The weight of being second-class disciples from the

Southern Edge Sect compared to those of Mount Hua was as different as a large boulder compared to a feather.

The disciples did their best during closed-door training but winning would be difficult.

‘At least, it would be nice if they don’t fall too easily.’

Hyun Jong’s heavy heart sank.

“Un Am.”

“Yes.”

“These children are returning after a long period of hard work. Make sure to prepare some good food and alcohol.”

“But…”

“It’ll be okay for the children to have one day of rest after all their training. Shouldn’t those children also get to experience how Mount Hua’s circumstances have changed?”

“That is true. I will prepare them without fail.”

“Okay.”

“I will leave then.”

Un Am got up and was ready to leave.

As Un Am left the room, Hyun Jong quietly got up and opened the window. Looking out, he sighed.

‘The Southern Edge sect.’

It was like a thorn was stuck in his heart. He took a breath and hoped that thorn would be cut off before it pierced in further.

“It is difficult. Difficult.”

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The Winter was long, and Mount Hua’s spring still seemed far away.

“We can win?”

Yoon Jong and Jo Gul gathered in Chung Myung’s room.

If someone else had said something like this, they would have ignored it, but Chung Myung’s words held a different weight to them.

Both Yoon Jong and Jo Gul knew. Chung Myung would never speak in vain. No matter how absurd it was, he accomplished the things he said he would.

“We?”

Chung Myung clicked his tongue, looked at the two, and answered.

“Not now.”

“*Huh?* Even if we are this strong?”

“Sahyungs have gotten stronger.”

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung raised his thumb and index with a minuscule gap between them and said,

“About this much?”

“…”

“…”

“*Ah*. Joking. It isn’t that much.”

“I knew it!”

“Of course.”

Chung Myung doubled the size of the small gap from before.

“About this much.”

“…”

“…”

Jo Gul’s face, which turned red, unable to hold it, yelled.

“Hey! We’ve been pushing ourselves to the verge of death to change so much. Does it make sense to say we only grew that much!? I can feel it in my body!”

“It’s only been a few months since you all started, and you were already on the verge of death?”

“No, but we are definitely stronger than before…”

“Even if an acorn grew three times in size, would it compare to a full-grown tree?”

“*Tch.* ”

Chung Myung made an honest evaluation.

The growth of the third-class disciples was terrifying. Growing at this rate was something Chung Myung never expected. They were forced into this training and still managed to achieve great results. Imagine what kind of growth they would have if they trained whole-heartedly!

But…

‘They aren’t there yet.’

Compared to the third-class disciples of the past, these guys had a long way to go.

But the Southern Edge Sect was the same as before.

Mount Hua may have lorded over the Southern Edge Sect in the past, but their skills had waned compared to their days of glory. On the other hand, the Southern Edge Sect hadn’t changed. Even if their abilities were similar to the past, it was still too much for Mount Hua. Even defeating a third-class disciple would prove problematic

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in the coming conference.

‘But maybe these two?’

As for Jo Gul, it seemed like he would have a chance to win. Yoon Jong needs to be a bit more refined.

Only two of the third-class disciples. Still, this was good.

“Then, how do we win?”

“It will be fine.”

Yoon Jong frowned.

“The conference will begin in just a few days. If we couldn’t win after months of training, what could we possibly do to catch up before they get here?”

“Which is why I asked.”

“…asked what?”

Chung Myung chuckled.

“If you are prepared to die.”

“…”

No, that…

“Did you hear what you said?”

“Does that matter? What’s important is if you are prepared.”

“No…”

The moment Jo Gul was about to say something, Yoon Jong interrupted him and said,

“I am resolute.”

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“Sahyung!”

Jo Gul raised his voice, but Yoon Jong didn’t even look in his direction.

“I don’t know about the other Sahyungs, but I am ready. I am sure most of the others are willing as well.”

“Sahyung, do you know what you’re saying…?”

“I know.”

Yoon Jong seemed determined.

“It doesn’t matter. If I die right now, at least I’ll never have to see that situation again.

I can still see those disgusting bastards standing over us and laughing in my dreams.”

“…that’s true.”

These two experienced the tragedy of the conference two years ago. It wasn’t simply a defeat but a disastrous experience.

How could they put their feelings into words?

“If I could return that humiliation, I would be willing to risk death. It isn’t something that I want to live with. I’d rather turn around and go down the mountain than go through that again.”

Jo Gul nodded his head.

Yoon Jong’s words roused Jo Gul’s memories of their previous humiliation. He also felt that he would do anything to avoid repeating that experience.

“Well, yes. Then I’ll stand with you, Sahyung.”

“I believe you.”

“Great.”

Chung Myung smiled.

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However, Jo Gul felt uncomfortable.

“But Chung Myung.”

“Yes?”

“How will we do it?”

“*Ah*, it is nothing. I am just going to change the way that we practice.”

“How?”

Chung Myung replied.

“Practical test.”

“*Huh?* ”

“What you’ve been learning, you should be able to apply it. I will show you how to use your body.”

“…”

Jo Gul’s eyes shook slightly.

“*Uh*… how to use it?”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“You know that all martial arts are learned with the body. Get ready. We’ll start right away this evening.”

“…”

The two disciples felt a hunch that something was going wrong.

Late at night.

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The third-class disciples gathered in the training hall.

“No, do we really have to gather at night like this?”

Jo Gul pouted and grumbled.

Now, there were no elders unaware that the third-class disciples trained at dawn.

At first, some expressed their concerns about the practice, and some were skeptical.

Now that it had been ongoing for months, though, everyone just accepted it.

Un Geom even recognized the effect and informed the other elders to prevent interference.

They could practice freely in the morning, but now Chung Myung even wants to train at night?

“What the hell is he trying to do, Sahyung?”

“I don’t know.”

Yoon Jong shrugged.

Everyone complained, but not a single person walked away.

Everyone understood. Although Chung Myung's training was radical, it was the most effective.

If Chung Myung said he would make them stronger, then he would do that.

"Is everyone here?"

At that moment, Chung Myung approached the hall.

The third-class disciples looked at him with a mixture of excitement and anxiousness.

They were sure that something crazy would come at them again, but they knew that it would lead to further growth if they could persevere.

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The third-class disciples had all come to trust Chung Myung.

"Chung Myung. But this time, the training is…"

It was then.

Shhh!

Chung Myung unsheathed the sword at his waist.

"…"

A real sword?

… *Uh?*

It looked like a real sword.

Even if an ordinary person was holding a real sword, that was enough to make one feel frightened.

However, seeing a crazy younger disciple with a sword gave their pounding hearts a sinking feeling.

"*Ah,* training?"

Chung Mung asked calmly and slowly approached them with the real sword.

"It is nothing much. Just that…"

His lips twisted into a smile.

"All you have to do is die once. It isn't much, right?"

…what!? That crazy bastard!

Chung Myung's gaze slowly shifted from left to right.

The people receiving Chung Myung's gaze couldn't even make eye contact with him and quickly turned away their gaze.

'Don't look him in the eye.'

'Shit! I got caught!'

The third-class disciples desperately turned away from Chung Myung. Just by looking at his gleaming eyes, it was obvious that they

wouldn’t be able to back out if they got caught.

“You…”

An eerie voice that seemed to crawl its way out from the depths of hell emerged from Chung Myung.

“I don’t want to see you losing to those Southern Edge bastards!”

His eyes were gleaming with madness!

‘I might pee here!’

‘What am I supposed to do if he comes at me with that insane look on his face!?’

‘He looks even crazier today than normal. Is it because it’s a full moon tonight?’

Even if everyone else accepted defeat, Chung Myung would never admit it. The other may think that it’s reasonable to lose to the Southern Edge Sect, but Chung Myung would never be able to sleep if they suffered defeat at their hands. How could he live peacefully without punishing those idiots that stole the Plum Blossom Sword technique?

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“Sahyungs, you need to win. I will make it so that you win.”

“…”

Everyone was desperate to escape from this demon.

But even when there were so many people, why wasn’t there at least one person who could speak up?

“But…”

It was Jo Gul.

With a blank face, he looked up.

“What do you mean by that? To die once?”

“*Oh?* ”

Chung Myung smiled when he heard the question.

“Sahyung. Sahyung, come to me”

“…Me?”

Jo Gul raised his finger and pointed to his face.

“Yes.”

“…”

Jo Gul looked around and saw all the other sahyungs happily nodding their heads.

Jo Gul stood blankly with his mouth agape as the feeling of betrayal rushed over him.

‘You traitors!’

Was there no such thing as companionship? Before Chung Myung came to Mount Hua, there was strong loyalty among them. Just when did this place turn so harsh?

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“Come here! Quick, quick!”

“Great Sahyung.”

Jo Gul looked back at Yoon Jong for the last time, who lightly coughed and spoke.

“Go already.”

“You son of a…”

He stopped himself from cursing.

In the end, Jo Gul bowed his head and trudged forward like a cow being led to a slaughterhouse. Yoon Jong’s eyes fell on Jo Gul.

Chung Myung looked at Jo Gul and said,

“You said you wanted to fight them, right?”

“…yes.”

“It might be a bit strange, but…”

Chung Myung chuckled. It was an eerie sight to see his chilling smile illuminated by the light of the moon as he held a real sword.

“Sahyung is already strong enough.”

“… *Huh?* ”

“It’s not like your training until now was done in vain.”

Jo Gul frowned.

“So, we aren’t too far from the Southern Edge Sect?”

“That would be a no.”

Chung Myung quietly shook his head.

‘Wasn’t Lee Song-Baek known to be one of the strongest second-class disciples?’

Seeing how the other disciples treated Lee Song-Baek, he was definitely strong. If he had to assume what level of strength the third-class disciples would have based on that…

‘It's similar to what I thought before.’

Jo Gul can compete fine, and Yoon Jong might need some luck on his side. But the other disciples had no chance.

Of course, the competition can change rapidly depending on their individual physical conditions and luck. But, unless heaven’s luck falls on them, the other third-class disciples of Mount Hua cannot overpower the Southern Edge sect.

“Although, it isn’t because sahyungs are weak.”

“…what is it then?”

“You’ve reforged your body, but you are doing the same things you did before.”

“*Huh?* ”

Body?

Jo Gul looked down at his body.

‘My body did change.’

Thanks to Chung Myung's weird training and the medicine he gave out, the third-class disciples became so strong that they could compete at a higher level.

Just seeing the muscular frames that everyone had developed brought a smile to his face.

Of course, it wasn't just good to look at.

After adapting to the training, the disciples realized that their bodies had become stronger than in the past. Their swords moved faster in their hands, and their lower body was as strong and stable as a boulder.

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"But it's the same thing. Is there something wrong with what we are doing now?"

"That's what I'm going to be telling you from now on."

Chung Myung smiled and approached Jo Gul.

Kuk!

Chung Myung's sword scratched against the ground with a grating sound. Jo Gul gulped and stared at his approaching figure.

"Sahyung."

"Yes?"

"Why are you learning the sword?"

"…that…"

In the Mount Hua sect, there could only be one answer to that.

One controls the body and sword to eventually reach the greatest understanding of Dao. A sword is a tool along the path to achieving the highest peak of the Dao.

‘There is no way this guy wants that answer.’

If he decided to say nothing, he would be insulted.

So…

“Isn’t it to beat up our opponents?”

“Wow!”

Chung Myung clapped in applause.

“That’s a shocking answer from Sahyung. It’s really unsuitable for us Taoists, but that is the correct answer for a typical swordsman.”

…it would have been better to give the obvious answer.

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Chung Myung nodded his head.

“You’re half right. It’s to win. So, what should we do to win with the sword?”

“Shouldn’t we grow stronger?”

Knowing that no matter what answer he gave would lead to him being verbally thrashed, Jo Gul answered right away.

“Right.”

However, Chung Myung agreed with Jo Gul's statement.

"You just need to be stronger. If you are stronger than the opponent, you will win.

But this means things might be a little different."

"…I don't understand."

"It's simple."

Chung Myung smiled brightly and raised his sword.

"From now on, Sahyung and I are going to fight. Sahyung, use every possible means to overcome me. I will only swing my sword once."

"…really?"

"Yes."

Jo Gul frowned.

'Isn't he ignoring my strength too much?'

Jo Gul was already used to dealing with Chung Myung. He knew better than anyone that beating Chung Myung was impossible no matter how hard he tried.

But this fight was a different story.

No matter how wide the gap between them is, it would damage his pride to lose to Chung Myung when he would only do one slash.

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'I need to show him how strong I am!'

Jo Gul clenched his teeth and raised the wooden sword.

“Are you going to continue with the real sword?”

“Yes.”

“…it might hurt someone.”

“Maybe.”

Why wasn’t he giving a clear answer?

Was he going to cut Jo Gul or not?

Jo Gul shook his head to clear and calm his mind.

“Can I start?”

“*Oh?* ”

As Jo Gul confidently raised his wooden sword, Chung Myung smiled.

“You seem to be quite confident, Sahyung.”

“Thanks to you, I trained myself to death!”

“*Hmmm*.”

Chung Myung smiled as he lifted his sword.

‘Confidence, that’s good.’

Those who wield the sword need to be confident. People who don’t believe in themselves have difficulty showing their abilities.

But…

‘It is a little too early.’

The third-class disciples are still just chicks. As Mount Hua has been developing at breakneck speed lately, it was natural for the disciples to be excited. But now wasn't the time to be confident; it was the time to solidify their basics.

Chung Myung had to show them that.

Jo Gul stared at Chung Myung with a fierce glare.

"Be prepared!"

"*Huh?* "

"This isn't personal in any way! *Haaaa!* "

Jo Gul charged and jumped towards Chung Myung. His eyes were burning furiously in contrast to his words that no personal feelings were involved.

It was flustering that he was showing so much killing intent.

'Did I do something wrong?'

The others would be dumbfounded and pissed off if they had heard Chung Myung's casual thoughts, but fortunately, no one could.

Chung Myung silently dodged Jo Gul's swift sword strike.

"*Haaa!* "

However, Jo Gul's sword began to make a dizzying change.

Falling Petals Sword.

Even though it had been less than a month since they started to learn this, Jo Gul was able to skillfully wield it. In harmony with the Seven Star Steps, the Falling Petal Sword was so sophisticated that those who didn't know the sword stood in awe.

'He sure is talented.'

Chung Myung looked at Jo Gul with renewed vigor.

Judging by the innate talent in the sword, Jo Gul was second to none in Mount Hua.

Judging by his talent alone, he was even on par with Lee Song-Baek.

'However.'

Chung Myung smiled.

Aren't plants supposed to grow stronger when they are stepped on occasionally?

This wasn't a selfish thought; it was purely for the sake of Jo Gul's growth.

Chung Myung tightly grabbed his sword.

"Isn't he doing quite a bit better than what we expected, Sahyung?"

"…better?"

"Yes. It seems like sahyung is pushing Chung Myung into a corner."

Yoon Jong smiled bitterly.

“It sure does look like that.”

“What?”

“It looks like he’s pushing Chung Myung into a corner, but not once has he been able to land an attack on him.”

“*Ah*…”

While the others paid attention to Jo Gul’s sword, Yoon Jong paid attention to Chung Myung’s movement.

Footwork?

No, it wasn’t that.

Chung Myung wasn’t using any special footwork or techniques. If the opponent came close then, he would back away, and if the enemy attacked, he would slip past their moves. With one step at a time, he steadily dodged everything as if he could read Jo

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Gul’s movements before they were made.

Honestly, it was more like watching a well-choreographed sword dance than a match.

Jo Gul’s sword cut the air only inches away from Chung Myung as if it was intentionally avoiding him with each step.

‘Just how far ahead is he able to predict Jo Gul’s movements?’

The only time Yoon Jong fought with Chung Myung was when he got beaten or when they were training together.

It has already been several months since Chung Myung came to Mount Hua, but it was his first time seeing Chung Myung spar in a match.

Yoon Jong was able to understand.

The difference between Chung Myung and them.

“*Eik!* ”

Jo Gul clenched his teeth and shook his sword.

He couldn’t hit the opponent.

It was like fighting with a ghost. Even though the technique was executed perfectly, Chung Myung avoided it with casual movements.

Just one inch.

If Jo Gul aimed for Chung Myung’s head, he would tilt his head to avoid it. If he aimed for the shoulder, he would glide out of the way. Just one inch closer, and it could have been a hit or a strike or anything.

It was an uncomfortable feeling.

Jo Gul’s loss that first night that Chung Myung arrived in Mount Hua was one thing.

But wasn’t it supposed to be different now? Even when he was doing his best, couldn’t he at least hit him once?

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Jo Gul clenched his teeth and poured strength into the sword he held.

“*Arghhhhh!* ”

Jo Gul’s sword brilliantly shone bright blue.

“Sword qi?”

“He can use sword qi?”

The voices coming from behind didn’t reach Jo Gul’s ears.

Jo Gul achieved this feat while in a desperate situation as he was determined to pummel Chung Myung.

But,

“This is the end.”

At that moment, Chung Myung suddenly stepped forward. He raised his sword above Jo Gul’s head with just one step.

Jo Gul saw it.

The sight of Chung Myung raising his sword.

The world seemed to come to a stop. Yet, within this frozen world, Chung Myung’s sword continued unimpeded. In a natural motion, like a gentle breeze or free-flowing water, the sword swung down.

‘This?’

The sword that pointed exactly at him stopped.

And

Swosh!

With a force that made his ears go momentarily deaf, it fell on Jo Gul’s head.

‘I’m going to die… ’

Jo Gul couldn’t take his eyes off the sword in spite of all that was happening. In an instant, the life he lived till then flashed in front of his eyes.

Before he even realized it, the sword touched his head.

Paaah!

Then, with a sound reminiscent of eardrums exploding, the sword stopped right at Jo Gul’s forehead.

Thud!

Jo Gul fell backward to the ground, staring at Chung Myung as if his soul had left his body.

Then, Chung Myung smiled and opened his mouth.

“How does it feel to die?”

“…”

What do you mean? How does it feel…!? It feels exhausting.

Uh… um, well…

Sweat was pouring like a waterfall.

“*Phew*…”

When Jo Gul realized he wasn’t dead, his entire body began to pour out sweat as if to prove he was still alive. He was so drenched that it was difficult to open his eyes.

Soon, his body started to tremble.

‘What if it had cut just an inch deeper!?’

No, not even an inch more. Jo Gul might have died with his head split open if the sword had been stopped just a hair later.

“This… this… *Uh*.”

He wanted to curse, but the shock he felt prevented him from speaking. His body was trembling, and despite his best efforts, there was no soothing that fear.

Chung Myung smiled and looked at Jo Gul.

“How was it?”

“…What?”

“I asked, how was it?”

“…”

‘What the hell do you mean ‘How was it?’ you son of a bitch!?’

Normally, he might have found the words to answer, but Jo Gul didn’t have the mind or body to spare right now.

“Do you feel like you’ve died?”

“That…”

Jo Gul squeezed out the last bit of his strength.

“I feel like I lost, you crazy bastard…”

“*Hehehe*.”

Despite being cursed, Chung Myung didn’t seem to mind.

It was natural. Jo Gul had experienced what it’s like to go to hell and back; he was bound to be upset. If Jo Gul had a bit more strength, he might have rushed and attacked Chung Myung for putting him through that.

“Okay, Sahyung will rest now.”

Chung Myung turned around cheerfully and shifted his gaze to the other sahyungs who were looking at him.

Flinch.

Those who made eye contact quickly lowered their gazes.

“Sahyungs. Sahyungs. Think very carefully.”

“…”

“Can you really avoid this?”

‘That devil!’

‘How did such a person even enter Mount Hua!’

‘Is a Taoist supposed to be like this?’

Looking at Chung Myung, they were sure that he was a perfect example of what a Taoist shouldn’t be like.

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“Come on. Don’t waste time. If you want to get strong, you need to step forward.

Great Sahyung?”

“…”

Yoon Jong glanced at Chung Myung with shaky eyes before turning his head and averting his gaze.

“J-Jonghak, how about you go next?”

“*Uh?* Sahyung. I think he called for you.”

“So, you’re not going out?”

When Yoon Jong turned and asked, Jonghak bowed his head.

‘Everyone here has turned into something strange because of him!’

Still, Yoon Jong had the dignity of a Sahyung, but after Chung Myung came, things changed. It wasn’t like Yoon Jong was the only one who changed, though.

“Aren’t you going to come?”

“…”

Chung Myung sighed, seeing the sahyungs push one another and try to avoid him.

“Such a shame. Sahyungs, who should be helping each other, are fighting with one another.”

‘Who do you think is the reason for this, you bastard!’

‘Did you sell your conscience somewhere?’

‘If only you weren’t here, this place would be at peace!’

Desperate cries echoed within the disciples’ minds but certainly didn’t come out of their mouths.

Seeing them like that, Chung Myung nodded.

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“There is only one way to unite the quarreling sahyungs. Brotherhood blooms when you share in each others’ suffering. Only by overcoming tribulations together will love unite you; don’t worry, I’ll be sure to treat you all fairly!”

What?

Chung Myung raised his sword.

“If you won’t come to me, then I will come to you. Here I come!”

Don’t! Don’t come, you crazy son of a bitch!

Whether they wanted it or not, Chung Myung, who seemed to have gone mad, rushed at them. Frightened, the disciples tried to run, but Chung Myung pursued everyone like a wolf after sheep.

“You! Get over here.”

“Who would go to you! You insane freak!”

Yoon Jong, who was screaming, closed his eyes as the sword fell towards his head.

“*Eu*…”

“*Ah*…”

The third-class disciples, scattered around the training hall, all trembled with frightened eyes.

“No. Mother…”

“Father, I promise to live a good life…”

“The beef jerky… I hid it under the bed…”

“Are you seriously thinking about food right now?”

Chung Myung clicked his tongue at the Sahyungs spread out all over the place.

“Alright, you all did well.”

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Normally, they would have been furious; but the current disciples didn’t even have the strength to yell or shout.

Having experienced a real sword fall on their head at frightening speed, they felt as if they had been pushed through the gates of the underworld. They didn’t want to do anything that would instigate Chung Myung to do it again.

Yoon Jong wiped the sweat running from his brows with trembling hands.

‘That fucking bastard… ’

Yoon Jong had been beaten by Chung Myung countless times, but this was different.

It felt like they had stepped one foot into the underworld this time.

Chung Myung looked at everyone and spoke.

“How was that?”

“…What?”

Fortunately, Jo Gul, who had rested, was able to speak.

“Why didn’t you stop my attack?”

“… *Huh?* ”

“It was an obvious strike. So, why didn’t you try to stop it?”

After doing all this, was he really asking that?

Jo Gul exclaimed, nearly in tears.

“It was fast! It was so fast that I couldn’t even think about stopping it! Even a three-year-old child would understand that it couldn’t be stopped!”

“Is that so?”

Chung Myung smiled.

“You understand well.”

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“You…”

Jo Gul gritted his teeth.

“Then, why didn't sahyungs stop it?”

“*Huh?* ”

Jo Gul looked at Chung Myung with blank eyes. Just as he was about to say something to refute, Chung Myung slashed the sword down.

Paaah!

Dust scattered, and the sound of air being torn apart echoed around.

“Simple, isn’t it?”

“…”

It wasn’t just Jo Gul.

The other Sahyungs also stood up and watched Chun Myung’s sword.

“…this was the same as the strike you did to us?”

“Yes.”

“Wasn’t it several times faster, though? Was it this gentle?”

“It’s the same. A sword that’s falling on your head would naturally seem different than a sword strike you watch from a distance.

“…”

Jo Gul was an intelligent guy in his own way. He quickly understood what Chung Myung was hinting at.

“You mean I can do it too?”

“With training.”

Chung Myung raised his sword.

“Look.”

And he slashed.

Paaah!

Jo Gul firmly engraved that scene into his memory. It was undoubtedly not blinding speed or advanced skills. It was just a plain, simple slash straight to the ground.

Hold the sword and slash.

A simple movement performed so flawlessly that it seemed to paint a portrait in time.

Jo Gul opened his mouth unwittingly.

“This is a drop slash.”

“…”

Jo Gul tried to speak but could not.

“You’ve built your body; now you need to utilize it to handle the sword. First, the lower body.”

Chung Myung stomped for a firm footing.

“Firmly fix your lower body, raise the strength up till the waist, transfer power to the fingers, unite it with internal strength, and strike out all at once.”

Paaah!

Chung Myung smiled.

“Easy, right?”

“…”

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After hearing the explanation, Yoon Jong spoke with a heavy voice.

“I understand what you are saying. You think that we should wield a simple sword based on a disciplined body rather than pursue flashy swordsmanship?”

“This is a One Hit Fatal Kill.”

Chung Myung supplemented Yoon Jong’s explanation.

“There is no thought of swinging the sword a second time. If you can’t deliver a killing blow in one strike, then be prepared to die.”

Yoon Jong sighed.

‘This is why he showed us this.’

It was said that one action could speak a thousand words.

There was a massive difference between hearing about a sword technique and directly facing it. It wouldn't have been easy for people who never experienced the fear of that sword falling on their heads to understand what it meant to be on the verge of death.

"But Chung Myung."

Yoon Jong exhaled and called him.

"I get what you mean, but we are disciples of Mount Hua. Would it be meaningful to win in such a way?"

"So what if we are disciples of Mount Hua?"

"If we're disciples of Mount Hua, shouldn't we defeat our opponents with Mount Hua's sword arts?"

Chung Myung looked at Yoon Jong as if his words were absurd.

"What did I do just now?"

"A down slash."

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"What's the first form of the Six Equilibrium Sword?"

"…a downward slash."

"Right. Isn't the Six Equilibrium Sword one of Mount Hua's techniques?"

When Chung Myung asked that, Yoon Jong coughed.

"I didn't think it through."

“*Tsk, tsk, tsk*.’

Chung Myung clicked his tongue and looked at everyone.

“The Sixfold technique used in the Six Equilibrium Sword is the foundation of all of Mount Hua’s techniques. Everything starts and ends with the Sixfold movement.”

Chung Myung looked at all those who were trying to avoid his gaze.

“You are chasing after more advanced techniques like the Falling Petal Swords and the Seven Star steps without fully mastering the basics!”

“*Ugh*.”

“Oh, the night air is quite refreshing.”

“The moon is bright too.”

The third-class disciples were flushed red in embarrassment and spoke strangely to avoid the topic.

“You need to clearly understand this.”

Chung Myung’s voice sank low. His usually playful tone had turned serious; noticing this, his sahyungs focused intensely on what he had to say.

“If you can’t master the Six Equilibrium Sword properly, there is no point learning any other swordsmanship. All the sword arts of Mount Hua are based on this. A building with an unstable foundation will collapse with even the slightest wind.”

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Everyone nodded.

If they hadn't seen it with their eyes, they wouldn't have believed it. But haven't they already experienced it now?

'The sword seemed so strong that I didn't think I could stop it.'

'A simple strike seemed like the best technique in the world.'

'What's important isn't the sword art being used, but the person who handles the sword.'

Jo Gul got up and looked at Chung Myung.

"Chung Myung."

"Yes."

"I will just ask one thing."

"Sure."

Jo Gul cleared his thoughts and opened his mouth.

"I understand that the Six Equilibrium Sword is important. But we aren't you. It may sound silly, but we need the strength to break the nose of those Southern Edge bastards right now. More than the strength of a distant future."

"*Hmm.* "

"To be honest, you are the only one who can use that technique so skillfully. That's why I need to ask."

Jo Gul's eyes shone.

"If we do what you tell us, we won't lose to the Southern Edge sect, right?"

Instead of answering, Chung Myung sighed.

Seeing his reaction, Jo Gul bit his lip.

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‘I must seem pathetic to him.’

A person who learns martial arts should not dwell on the results of one fight for long.

But losing to that sect was an experience that he never wanted to go through again.

That shame and humiliation…

“What did Sahyung even take away from what I said?”

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung blinked his eyes.

“You think you would lose to the Southern Edge Sect? Someone like that deserves to die! A disciple of Mount Hua losing to a scoundrel from the Southern Edge sect? I’ll smash that disciple’s head myself!”

Jo Gul trembled as he looked into the burning eyes of Chung Myung.

‘I can understand us behaving like that, but what kind of grudge does he have towards the Southern Edge sect?’

A guy who just entered Mount Hua.

“Didn’t I tell you? I will make you all win!”

Chung Myung raised his sword and pointed to the Sahyung.

“There is no such thing as a glorious defeat!”

“…”

“Winning is the only answer in a fight. Whether you need to hit their crotch or throw dust in their eyes! Once you win, it’s all over! Cowardice? Don’t even talk about it! Do you think a man who’s been decapitated on the battlefield can complain about cowardice? There is no such thing as companionship in a battle! Win by any means necessary!”

Chung Myung nonchalantly made a declaration that would shock the elders if they’d heard it.

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Seeing such a scene, Jo Gul smiled.

‘Right. This guy is normally like this.’

It felt reassuring for some reason.

“So, what do we do now? How can we use a sword like you?”

“It’s simple.”

Chung Myung smiled and spoke.

“First, we will start by swinging the sword ten thousand times.”

“…that must be a joke, right?”

“No way.”

“Of course, I’m just joking.”

“*Sigh.* ”

“It was a joke…”

Chung Myung had an ominously bright smile.

“Do you want to be defeated in the future? Or do you want me to kill you now?”

“…”

It seemed like there was a bigger villain inside Mount Hua than the Southern Edge Sect.

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Swish!

Un Geom retrieved his sword.

Drops of sweat ran down his forehead.

‘A good sword art.’

There was definitely something different about the Seven Sages Sword that they had learned from Mount Hua and what he was following now. It cannot be called the best, but the sword was still amazing.

It would take a heavy investment of time to truly understand and master this sword art. However, even with his shallow achievements,

Un Geom already understood that this Seven Sages Sword was a level higher than what they were currently taught.

‘If this sword can be taught properly, Mount Hua will become stronger.’

The present disciples will become stronger, and the future generations will be even more powerful.

“*Ahem.* ”

Just thinking about it made Un Geom smile.

“*Hmm.* ”

Un Geom quickly rubbed his smile away.

“This is quite difficult.”

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He was still a teacher, which meant he had to be strict with his disciples. Lately, though, he can’t stop smiling.

Until now, the experiences the third-class disciples have shared could not simply be summed up as mere hardships. Ever since they entered Mount Hua until now, there has been nothing but struggle and suffering.

Still, they devoted their youth to Mount Hua. With the collapsing sect on their shoulders, they constantly overcame the hardships and persevered through suffering. After such a long period of darkness, they were only now seeing the light.

‘We aren’t fully out of trouble yet.’

Although Un Geom could finally see the light at the end of the long tunnel, he was all too aware that there was still a long way to go.

Even so, he couldn't erase the smile on his face. It was all thanks to the third-class disciples, who started to grow strangely quick in recent times.

The elders and the sect leader seemed to find the greatest joy in the fact that Mount Hua was financially stable and had found its lost martial arts, but it was different for Un Geom.

As the head of the White Plum Blossom Boarding House, the growth of his disciples was what brought him the most satisfaction.

'They're different from us.'

The second-class disciples tried their best, but unfortunately, Mount Hua didn't have an appropriate environment to train or improve. To be honest, they didn't have much passion for martial arts either.

But the third-class disciples are more passionately devoted to their personal training than any of Mount Hua's previous disciples.

"*Hmm*."

Un Geom smiled, put the sword on his waist, and left the training hall with light steps. It was time to train the children.

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His imagination was overflowing with pleasant thoughts.

Mount Hua's desperate situation had been resolved. With their recovered martial arts and the third-class disciples showing a vigorous desire to grow their martial talents, it seemed that the hour of Mount Hua's resurrection was growing near.

And the main characters of that revival will be the third-class disciples.

“I’ll have to work harder for that to happen!”

How could he call himself their mentor if he couldn’t even lead his students, who were working hard by themselves?

Un Geom turned and entered the disciples’ training hall before shouting with a flushed face.

“Okay, let’s do well today to—what is this!? Fuck!”

Un Geom stepped back in shock.

What was in front of his eyes could only be described as pure chaos.

“*Ahhhh*. Arm… my arm!”

“B-back… my back is down… broken!”

“S-save me… save me…”

Unknowingly, Un Geom rubbed his eyes.

What had happened in this training hall? Suddenly, Un Geom felt that his dreams of teaching Mount Hua’s future leaders had been set ablaze and were crashing down around him.

All the third-class disciples were lying on the floor, groaning while holding their wooden swords. Their shoulders trembling and mouths drooling.

“What the hell happened…”

At that moment, a sound erupted from somewhere nearby.

“*Uhhhh!*”

Un Geom turned his head and saw Jo Gul’s figure using his wooden sword with his shirt off.

“J—Jo Gul…”

“*Uhhhh! Uhhhh! Hmmmmm!*”

Sweat was pouring down his body like rain. Each time the sword was swung, sweat scattered, and a hot breath could be seen exhaling from his mouth.

Blazing red eyes, full of focus, and trembling shoulders told the story of a boy pushing himself past his limits. Even Un Geom felt his entire body tremble at the sight.

“Okay, one more.”

At those words, Un Geom’s eyes turned.

‘What is with him?’

Next to Jo Gul, Chung Myung was slowly holding his sword. Unlike Jo Gul, who was sweating profusely, Chung Myung seemed rather refreshing.

His hair was neat, not even a single strand out of place. He wielded his sword smoothly in a relaxed fashion, unlike the sahyungs scattered around on the verge of death.

“Just swinging your sword isn’t enough! If you are going to swing once, imagine squeezing out all your strength. From the tip of your toes to your head, and through your sword! Once more!

What was this situation?

Wasn’t Chung Myung the youngest of the third-class disciples? So why is he teaching Jo Gul?

However, everything Chung Myung said was correct.

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“Okay, one more…”

“*Kuaaak!* ”

In the end, Jo Gul, who couldn’t stand it, fell to the floor. Seeing that, Chung Myung clicked his tongue.

“*Tch tch*. You people are seriously weak.”

Chung Myung sighed deeply.

“You’re just overworking your body. You aren’t a cow! Use that head of yours! Use your brain! Think about how to swing the sword so that you can utilize all the strength in your body and then swing it!”

What?

Un Geom’s eyes trembled.

The other elders might be unaware, but Un Geom knew that Chung Myung could control the third-class disciples to some extent. It may be difficult to understand, but weren’t there always talented people whose skills transcended their age?

However, what Chung Myung was discussing now wasn’t something that could be waved off as simple talent or ability.

‘Does this mean that he has a higher understanding of the martial arts?’

The more he observed this kid, the more amazed he felt.

Un Geom, suddenly awoken from his thoughts, shook his head.

This wasn't the time for such things.

"What is this!?"

Chung Myung shook his head when Un Geom asked.

"Oh my! Teacher!"

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Chung Myung quickly ran up to Un Geom.

"How was last night?"

Seeing him act like a child, the third-class disciples gritted their teeth.

'That sly son of a bitch!'

'If he was in the Imperial palace, there would have been books written positively about him!'

'He's a demon with no spine, constantly changing sides!'

Why wouldn't they be upset? Chung Myung was the youngest and should have shown respect to them as his sahyungs, but he only showed respect to Un Geom and the other elders.

In particular, Jo Gul and Yoon Jong, who were the biggest victims, dejectedly looked at Chung Myung with narrowed eyes.

"What happened here?"

“We were training.”

“Training? This is training?”

No, it certainly was training. Un Geom witnessed Jo Gul swinging the sword with his own two eyes. But the result was…

“*Kuaak*…”

“T-teacher…”

“Too… too difficult. I might die…”

The third-class disciples looked at Un Geom like puppies who found their master.

Without realizing it, Un Geom ended up raising his voice upon seeing their expressions.

“Training is a part of the process to develop the body and mind. Don’t you know that

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too much training is poisonous? And you—”

“I know, teacher.”

“*Uh?* ”

Un Geom’s eyes narrowed as Chung Myung’s words interrupted his lecture. Did this mean that he had a proper response to give in this situation?

“But this training wasn’t started by me. The Sahyungs, who didn’t want experience disgrace in the Mount Hua and Southern Edge Sect

conference, have—”

“C-conference?”

Right. The conference was approaching soon. That was true…

“Sahyungs were upset with the humiliation they faced last time…”

Upset?

Un Geom slowly turned his head and looked at the third-class disciples.

The children were desperately waving their hands behind Chung Myung. Seeing their reaction, Un Geom said.

“Looking at the children, that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

“What? Is that possible? Sasuk! How could one be proud to declare themselves a disciple of Mount Hua if they’ve suffered defeat at the hands of those Southern Edge bastards!?

Huh?

He was right.

“We can lose once. But losing twice is unforgivable! A disciple of the Great Mount Hua should never accept such results.”

“…right.”

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Confusion beset Un Geom as he began to nod his head.

There were only two things he valued most in the world. One was the pride of Mount Hua, and the other was to raise the disciples correctly.

Now, it seemed that both of his values had turned their blades towards one another and conflicted.

Chung Myung, who read the confusion in Un Geom's eyes, approached and whispered.

"Sasuk, think about it. The best way to raise Mount Hua's honor is to strengthen the Sahyungs and break apart those Southern Edge Sect bastards, right?"

"That…"

"The elders will also appreciate and praise Sasuk's hard work."

'This sly bastard!'

Un Geom wasn't oblivious; he could tell that Chung Myung was manipulating him, but such sweetly honeyed words were too enticing for Un Geom to ignore. He wasn't interested in receiving praise for his efforts, but to beat down the Southern Edge Sect was…

"Do you think it's possible?"

Unknowingly, Un Geom had asked for Chung Myung's opinion.

Hearing that, Chung Myung smiled.

"I am Chung Myung."

"…"

Un Geom looked at Chung Myung and coughed.

Looking back, it was none other than Chung Myung who had changed these children.

Weren’t these children training because of Chung Myung?

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Perhaps this process was more necessary than learning a new sword art. No matter how lucky he was, it was impossible to teach that new sword technique in a short period and overcome the Southern Edge Sect.

‘Just once more… ’

Un Geom looked at everyone and opened his mouth to speak.

“Disciples! Listen to me!”

“Yes, Sasuk!”

The third-class disciples set their full attention on Un Geom, desperately pleading with their tired eyes. Their last hope…

“There’s a limit to how proud I can be that you are showing such enthusiasm in your training. After all, it is my responsibility to be the one who guides you all. However, it wouldn’t be right for me to disturb your ambitions when you’re voluntarily training so vigorously.”

…what is this?

Oh? Is that the sound of hope crashing into pieces?

“Until the conference, I will leave the training to you all. In the meantime, you don’t have to come to the training hall and are free to train anywhere. However, you must be careful not to hurt yourselves.”

Master?

…this isn't right! Sasuk?

"*Ahem*. You may all continue now."

Un Geom turned his body away.

Some third-class disciples unwittingly stretched out their hands to grab hold of their fading hope. But upon seeing the look in Chung Myung's eyes, they quickly pulled back.

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Eventually, Un Geom walked away, and Chung Myung turned his body and twisted his head toward the abandoned disciples.

"Who was the one that told Sasuk that you were having a hard time?"

"…"

"Say it quickly."

"…"

The eyes of the third-class disciples were dyed with despair as they watched Chung Myung pull out the wooden sword on his waist.

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“*Tsk.* This is too much work.”

Chung Myung climbed the mountain with an expression that clearly showed his annoyance.

“It’s so slow.”

Chung Myung sighed.

He had never raised a disciple in his previous life.

Even his sahyung, who always desperately searched for reasons to nag Chung Myung, never once dared to ask that he take in a disciple.

His sahyung held discussions with the other elders who were worried about whether Chung Myung’s unparalleled swordsmanship would be passed onto future generations.

What he told them was,

– I am worried about that as well. However, I am still a human. I feel sympathy and love just as anyone else does. I cannot ever request a disciple to be sent under him.

Chung Myung is the sort of man that would beat a dog for not walking upright. Of what sin did the children partake to deserve such punishment? If we are Taoists who cultivate the Dao, we cannot commit such acts of cruelty.

Since then, no one ever asked Chung Myung to accept disciples.

‘Now that I think about it, it feels pretty bad. Those bastards just spoke about me however they wanted.’

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What's so bad about his methods? They are growing up so well!

Of course, it took a lot of work.

Chung Myung raising the third-class disciples was no different from an adult teaching an infant to walk.

If it was anyone else, they would coddle the child and hold them at every step.

However, the toddler can only truly stand independently by being thrown off their feet and figuring it out for themselves.

"*Ugh*. I really would rather die than to suffer like this."

As a result, it took more time than expected, and as the training dragged on, there wasn't enough time left for Chung Myung's own practice. He was almost at the point where he was ready to sacrifice his sleep in order to train.

Chung Myung took a deep breath and looked up at the sky.

"Sahyung. Do I have to go this far? It's easier for me to just try and grow myself instead of waiting for them to catch up."

– Well, do that then.

"*Eh*, seriously!"

Chung Myung sighed.

He was well aware that it would be impossible to recover Mount Hua's former glory on his own.

Sure, Chung Myung could make Mount Hua famous alone, but he couldn't live forever, right? Then, wouldn't Mount Hua disappear

once he dies?

What Chung Myung had to create was the spirit of Mount Hua, which would never disappear.

A flower with beautiful petals is nice, but it fades and rots quickly. The spirit of Mount Hua must be like the roots of a great tree, it may not be seen, but it keeps the being alive.

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“I know…”

How can life be so easy?

Chung Myung felt dizzy at the task ahead of him.

He continued organizing his thoughts as he climbed the mountain. Upon arriving at his training ground, he quickly scanned the surroundings.

‘She won’t come here again, right?’

He was an hour early. It was time for everyone to be in bed. No matter how driven a disciple was, they wouldn’t come to train at this hour.

Of course, he would have to meet her later, but that would be when she officially comes back to Mount Hua.

“*Uh?* ”

Chung Myung, who gazed around, raised the wooden sword wrapped around his waist.

His eyes, which looked at the sword, were serious as he stood tall. The playful eyes he had when teaching the children faded away; replacing them were the eyes of a swordsman who had been through countless battlefields with his sword.

‘Return to the old me?’

No, that won’t be enough.

Chung Myung broke his entire foundation. He denied the history he had built up in his previous life and started a new foundation.

To go further.

But that alone won’t be enough. Chung Myung changed the foundation of his strength, but he couldn’t change his swordsmanship. If the sword wasn’t changed, then he would have to make his sword stronger.

A little bit stronger, faster. No, it wasn’t enough.

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‘Did I defeat the Heavenly Demon?’

No.

If the Heavenly Demon hadn’t exhausted his energy after the joint efforts of those who climbed the mountain, Chung Myung would have never been able to take him down.

Chung Myung had claimed that he was the greatest swordsman in the world, but he was just a loser that was unable to defeat the Heavenly Demon in frontal conflict.

‘What if I could have defeated the Heavenly Demon alone?’

If that was the case, no one else would have died.

Both the Sahyungs and Sajaes would have returned to Mount Hua safely. They would have lived their lives peacefully, and his Sahyung would be back to nagging Chung Myung while he secretly drank alcohol.

Then Mount Hua wouldn't have collapsed, and no one would have died on that mountain with the Heavenly Demon.

Regret?

It's not exactly like that.

Chung Myung wasn't the kind to hold onto the past and weep. The problem was what lies ahead.

'Where is the guarantee that someone like the Heavenly Demon wouldn't appear again?'

Perhaps a more frightening character than the Heavenly Demon might aim for them.

To protect Mount Hua from all possible crises, he had to become strong. Greater than anyone in the world, more than Chung Myung of the past and the Heavenly Demon!

To do that…

Chung Myung's sword, which was nearly perfect in the past, couldn't hurt the

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Heavenly Demon.

‘Why?’

Because he hadn’t tried to sharpen the sword further?

No.

“No matter how sharp a tiger’s claw is, it cannot catch a flying bird.”

There is a limit that cannot be crossed.

The Heavenly Demon’s martial arts shattered everything Chung Myung believed was right. As if ridiculing Chung Myung, who thought that the end could be reached by following the path paved by the ancestors.

Just like a person with his feet on the ground looking at a bird flying freely in the sky, he had no choice but to stare at that unachievable dream.

If Chung Myung wanted to reach the Heavenly Demon’s level, then he would have to jump beyond his past self first.

But how?

Chung Myung’s eyes narrowed.

‘I’ll have to throw it away.’

But to discard everything?

Only when the vessel is empty can it be refilled with something new. However, Chung Myung already emptied everything when he was reborn anew. Now, he would have to refill it.

So, what should he fill it with?

Would it be Mount Hua’s teachings or Chung Myung’s own path? If not…?

“It doesn’t matter.”

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Chung Myung’s sword begins to move slowly.

Protect the techniques and teaching of Mount Hua? Abandon Mount Hua’s guidance?

Or create a new path as Chung Myung?

– It is all an obsession.

Right. Sahyung.

If filling it was natural, so was throwing things away. There was no need to decide right away what to fill and what to discard.

Look.

Isn’t the sword still moving as it did in the past?

Don’t set limits.

The moment you decide what to accept and what to abandon, the sword becomes bound by limits that have been created. Leave it alone. Let the sword travel as it pleases and as Chung Myung wills it.

The sword of Chung Myung drew soft arcs, cutting through the dark.

At the same time, it seemed like Plum Blossoms began to bloom in the sky.

Although it was the Plum Blossom of Mount Hua, it was different from what Chung Myung knew.

It was a little more lively and a bit gentler.

It stretched out and scattered and then descended.

From east to west and back to east.

The plum blossoms that began at the tip of Chung Myung's sword bloomed. Soon after, white flowers encroached upon the night sky, bringing an early spring to the mountain peak where he was training.

Soft, fast, glamorous, and beautiful.

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However, plum blossoms are bound to wither.

Atop the peak, the plum blossoms disappeared as if they had been a mere fantasy.

Chung Myung stood alone amid the fading illusion with his sword stretched out and closed his eyes.

'I feel like I learned something.'

He didn't completely understand, but it felt like he took a solid step forward.

Although it was Mount Hua's sword, it was a sword unique to Chung Myung that surpassed any of Mount Hua's other techniques.

A sword that can go beyond his limits and the limits of Mount Hua too.

“*Phew*.”

Chung Myung let out a low sigh.

‘It won’t be easy.’

It wasn’t about inventing a new sword art. It was about opening a new frontier and creating new opportunities. Still, it was a long way off. Just as Chung Myung’s history grows with him, this sword will grow too.

Now it was just the bud of a plum blossom.

But someday…

“You…”

“*Eik!* ”

Suddenly, a voice came from Chung Myung’s side, and he rushed away.

“Wow, Fuuuuuuuck! What!”

Before he could realize it, someone else had appeared. Chung Myung, frightened, repeatedly blinked as he scanned to see who it was.

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‘…is she that girl from last time?’

Yu… Yu… Yu something.

Ah right! Yu Yiseol! That was her name.

Yu Yiseol was looking at Chung Myung with a blank gaze.

‘No, but how did she get so close to me? I didn’t even sense her.’

No matter how great her technique was, Chung Myung should be better than her!

Even if he was deep in concentration, he could clearly feel the presence of those around him.

Last time too, this woman had done the same thing and suddenly popped up out of nowhere! What was with her?

‘Has she mastered the art of assassination? How can she keep doing this?’

Come to think of it, despite her being ahead of him right now, he could barely feel her presence.

It was one thing when you relied entirely on your eyes and ears, but it was unthinkable for this to happen to a Taoist who has mastered all five senses and utilizes their qi to sense their surroundings.

Seeing Yu Yiseol staring at him, Chung Myung was deeply concerned.

‘How do I fix this? How much did she see?’

For now, he needed to figure that out…

Yu Yiseol opened her mouth.

“Plum Blossom…”

Everything!

She clearly saw everything!

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She tilted her head to the side as if she didn’t understand what she saw.

Right, yes! Do not understand it.

Chung Myung smiled brightly.

If it was anyone else, they would have been dumbfounded in this situation. But who was Chung Myung? The unprecedented accident of Mount Hua.

His Sahyung made sure to point out every time that there were more accidents after Chung Myung joined Mount Hua than in the entire sect’s history before his initiation.

For such an experienced Chung Myung, this situation was nothing.

First, he needed to act naturally.

He bowed his head to Yu Yiseol.

“How have you been?”

As Chung Myung took a step closer, Yu Yiseol flinched.

Why? Why flinch?

Yi Yiseol looked at Chung Myung with serious eyes.

“Are you going to kill me to silence the witness?”

“What the fuck, are you crazy?”

“…”

Ah…

The words naturally escaped him.

Chung Myung, who cursed without realizing, covered his mouth in shock.

Another day wasted; just why did this woman have to come and bother him so much?

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Now, there was only one way out.

Chung Myung waved his hand and quickly fled the scene.

“Well then, goodbye for now!”

“*Ah*… wait!”

Yu Yiseol tried to stop Chung Myung, but he ignored her pleas and left at full speed.

‘When you can’t make any excuses, it’s best to just avoid the problem altogether.’

Yu Yiseol stretched out her hand towards his back but lowered it as he was already gone.

“Plum Blossoms…”

She looked at the running child’s back with blank eyes and clenched fists.

“I was caught!”

This was obviously Chung Myung's mistake.

Thinking about it, though, it won't make a difference if only one person caught him.

Even if she told everyone what happened, no one would believe it.

But he had to be careful from now on. If there's just one witness, they'll be written off as crazy. But if three or more people saw it, then everyone would believe it.

'When the Baek disciples return, I need to be careful with my training.'

Ah…

Not just the training, right?

Chung Myung nodded with a determined face.

"I have something I must do before the Baek disciples arrive!"

He quickly began to descend towards the sect.

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"Here!"

"*Oh*. Young master, you're here again. Come this way. We'll guide you to a good seat."

“I’m not asking too much of you, right?”

“Oh my. Why would it be like that? Thanks to your frequent visits, business is going well, and life is worth living. *Hahaha!* ”

Chung Myung headed to a window seat at the guidance of the restaurant owner.

“Here is a cold wet towel. Wait just a moment more and I will bring the alcohol that you always have. What would you like to eat for today?”

“Just give me whatever you recommend.”

“Yes. I will talk to the chef and ask for the best food to be prepared.”

‘I don’t want the best, I want the most delicious, you bastard!’

Who was he trying to fool!?

However, the man ran to the kitchen and brought two bottles of chilled alcohol.

“Here you are.”

“Thank you.”

Chung Myung opened the lid without delay and poured it into his glass as soon as he received the bottles.

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From the sound of pouring alcohol to the act of drinking alcohol, everything was delightful.

‘People live for this taste.’

No matter how much privilege Chung Myung had earned, and no matter how little he cared for the rules of Taoists, it was still unacceptable for a third-class disciple to drink alcohol in Mount Hua.

Alcohol wasn't banned completely, but it was strictly prohibited within the sect grounds.

But who was Chung Myung?

He was the sort of man who must do exactly what he is told not to do; especially tempting are the acts that are forbidden.

'Oddly, if you tell me not to eat, I end up eating more.'

The two bottles Chung Myung had stored in his cave were long gone, and now it had become a daily routine to change out of his uniform and stop by this place to have all that he wanted because of the permission the sect leader gave him.

How often did he frequent this restaurant? Well, only the owner of the place would know that.

"*Kuah!* "

Chung Myung gulped one glass down and looked at the other glass as if he had left the mortal plane and entered paradise.

"Taoists are supposed to go with the flow in life, so why do they have all these silly restrictions!?"

Aren't Taoist rules stupid?

What?

Chung Myung is a Taoist, too?

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No. He was a bit different.

Chung Myung poured another glass and brought it to his lips. Without holding back, he looked at the glass and then softly gulped with a smile.

“It isn’t the same as it used to be, sahyung.”

‘Alcohol tasted the best when hiding from the watchful eyes of that nagging Sahyung.

‘

“I am still here like this.”

There was no one there.

Chung Myung looked at the glass and smiled.

It felt strange.

He never missed anyone in his whole life, but now he was feeling sentimental while drinking.

“*Tch.* ”

But it wasn’t like he was too deep in his thoughts.

The past is the past. If the sahyungs saw this side of him, they would laugh at him.

In this world, whether they were called Taoists, Saints, or Deities, his Sahyung was innately just a playful old bastard.

The same went for Chung Myung.

“Now, here is the leopard fish skin, and here is the pig feet fry.”

The leopard fish skin was made with oyster meat, pork, and jellyfish, and the other one was made with onion and pork feet. Both were Shaanxi foods.

“What about pork belly?”

“It’s coming soon.”

Chung Myung raised his chopsticks, smacking his lips.

Weren’t the things on his table the best delicacies? After drinking a glass of alcohol, having a delicious piece of meat feels no different from entering nirvana.

‘This is paradise.’

‘Sahyung, sorry, but I plan to live. So, I hope you live happily wherever you are.’

The door opened, and a group of men entered.

“Welcome!”

The owner ran and greeted them.

All those who entered were young men and women.

‘Wait, maybe they’re too old to be considered young men?’

The men seemed tall, strong, and well-developed, but the women were certainly a bit younger than the men. In any case, Chung Myung observed them from the side.

Those who came inside sat at the table next to Chung Myung. Chung Myung didn't pay any more attention to them and went back to eating.

"We get to eat food after such a long time."

"We don't have to eat those fasting pills anymore, Sahyung."

"Isn't that why we're here? Our priority is to go up the mountain as soon as possible and greet our elders, but I'm sure they will understand us stopping here first."

Sahyung? Elders?

Chung Myung frowned and looked at the group seated next to him. All of them had black uniforms, and on the chest was a plum blossom pattern.

'The Baek disciples?'

They had an embroidered plum blossom, so they all had to be from Mount Hua. Since

Chung Myung had never seen them before, and their ages seemed to fit, they had to be the Baek disciples.

Chung Myung bowed his head.

He hadn't committed any crimes, but he didn't want to see them here. Nor did he want to get involved with them. Fortunately, he wasn't in uniform, so as long as he didn't get tangled up with them, there wouldn't be any problems.

‘I can’t even eat properly. *Ugh*. I need to quickly leave after gulping the food down.’

Meeting these people here would be a pain in the ass right now. It was best to not get involved at all.

“But where is Samae Yu?”1

“I think she went up Mount Hua first.”

“Didn’t we decide to meet in Hua-Um?”

“When did Samae Yu ever listen to us?”

“*Hm*. Then the masters might already know that we’re here.”

“It’s fine. Everyone knows that Samae Yu is unique.”

“Then we’re lucky.”

The young man sitting in the middle finished placing a simple order as he requested food and alcohol for everyone at his table.

‘Look at that. *Tsk. Tsk.* ’

Chung Myung frowned.

‘These little second-class disciples are openly drinking in the middle of Hua-Um!

Even if the sect is failing, this is too much!’

Children these days, seriously!

What?

What about Chung Myung?

Well, he is different. He's close to a hundred years old, after all…

"Everyone worked hard and overcame the training really well."

"Who among us could say they've suffered more than Sahyung? We just followed you."

"Right. Sahyung had the most difficult time."

A tall young man sitting in the middle with a smile.

'Isn't he handsome?'

Chung Myung was quite good-looking himself. But the black robe on this man and the presence he evoked,

How should it be put? Didn't he seem to appear like the legendary heroes in fairy tales?

"We've all trained hard, together. I know better than anyone just how hard everyone has worked. So, I will treat you all to this alcohol today. Don't feel burdened and drink as much as you want."

"Thank you. Sahyung."

"Just don't get too drunk. We need to climb up to Mount Hua in the evening."

"Yes."

Laughter filled the table.

So, they finished their training and settled on having a drink in Hua-Um upon returning? Then, the one being called Sahyung must be

the Great Sahyung of the Baek disciples, and the rest are the second-class Baek sahyungs.

Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to enter this place without a second thought.

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'I can imagine how the sect will turn out.'

Chung Myung snorted at the scene.

When he was a second-class disciple, he wouldn't have dared to even think about drinking with others. If anyone had been caught drinking, they would have been placed in the repentance room for an entire week!

That was why Chung Myung had to be stealthy when he drank!

Huh?

Yeah. He did drink. How could he not drink?

But it was fundamentally different! He drank in secret! Not openly like them!

Unaware of Chung Myung's poisonous thoughts, the disciples clinked their glasses and began to drink. As soon as the snacks were served and the table was filled, the atmosphere heated up.

'I should quickly eat and get out of here.'

Chung Myung moved quickly in a hustle. Yet, the moment he poured himself another glass, he heard some words that he couldn't ignore.

"Baek Cheon Sahyung."

“What is it, Sajae?”

“After all this hard work, we’ll be able to get good results in the conference, right?”

The one called Baek Cheon folded his arms and nodded.

“… *Umm*.”

“Right, Sahyung?”

“Sajae. To be honest, I don’t know. But there is one thing I do know.”

“What is that?”

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“Effort never betrays a man.”

Baek Cheon’s eyes had a brilliant shine in them.

“We’ve done our best. We made it through that arduous training and constantly beat ourselves up. Even if we don’t win, isn’t it true that we’ve made commendable progress in this time?”

“Yes. Sahyung.”

“Don’t get too hung up on winning or losing. We’re in this for the long game. If we lose our eyes in the present, we’ll never be able to see the future.”

“*Ah*… I was short-sighted.”

“However, I do want to win.”

Baek Cheon smiled softly. When a smile appeared on that handsome face, the surroundings seemed to brighten in response. The disciples there looked at him with absolute trust.

But there was one person nearby who had a rotten mien in response to his speech.

‘Does he put oil on his lips?’

Chung Myung gulped down alcohol with a sour expression as he listened to those smoothly flowing disgustingly sweet words. He wasn’t the kind who would enjoy such cringe-inducing speeches.

‘I think there’s something hidden about this man.’

He was the same as the others, but something felt a bit off about him. Although, it didn’t feel like he was a bad person…

“Then, where do we stand? Can we fight against the Southern Edge Sect on equal footing now?”

“Well.”

Baek Cheon opened his mouth with a sullen face.

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“The Southern Edge Sect is strong. Isn’t it one of the Ten Great Sects?”

“Yes.”

“In the past, Mount Hua was also one of the Ten Great Sects. However, to be honest, the difference between us and the Southern Edge Sect has grown beyond comparison.”

Everyone’s faces darkened at those words.

“But that’s just what others believe.”

Baek Cheon raised his voice as he spoke, refreshing the atmosphere.

“Skills aren’t necessarily proportional to fame. We lost to them in the last conference, but the difference wasn’t that large. During all this time, haven’t we focused on our training while even reducing our sleep? We’ll be able to contest against them well this time.”

“With the Southern Edge sect?”

“Was Southern Edge this great from its inception? Was Mount Hua always the Mount Hua that we know? Nothing is set in stone. If we work tirelessly, it’s not impossible for us to one day look beyond our current position.”

He spoke with a voice full of determination that attracted the hearts of those who listened.

As everyone gazed at Baek Cheon with admiration and respect, it happened.

“*Puah!* ”

A low chuckle from beside.

The heads of the six people sitting at the table turned in unison.

“*Uh*…”

Realizing that their gaze was on him, Chung Myung covered his mouth.

‘Shit, I didn’t mean to react.’

Hearing such absurd words, he ended up laughing.

Receiving everyone’s attention, Chung Myung came up with a solution to the situation as usual.

‘Just act natural.’

And he started to cough.

“*Puah! Ugh! Puah! Cough! Puaah!* ”

“…”

Chung Myung frowned when he saw that the disciples didn’t go back to talking with each other.

‘Why aren’t they deceived? My acting was perfect.’

Cough more violently!

“Young man.”

“What?”

Baek Cheon slowly rose from his seat and spoke to Chung Myung.

“Young man, who could you be? I don’t believe I’ve ever seen your face in Hua-Um before. If it isn’t too rude, may I ask your name and what family you belong to?

“…”

Why does it suddenly seem like Chung Myung was screwed?

Right?

1. A woman with the same master that joined at a later time, feminine equivalent

to sajae↩

Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes.

‘Who is this guy?’

He was nothing short of absurd.

From the moment they entered this place, he felt a sense of incongruity. Now that he looked closely, he understood why he felt that way.

Why was there a child, who might have just turned 15 this year, ordering all of this expensive food and alcohol?

Of course, it wasn’t impossible.

The sons of high-ranking officials or the children of wealthy elites could do this. The children of the merchant families also often enjoy such pleasures from a young age.

The problem was that this was Hua-Um.

As far as Baek Cheon knew, there were no high-ranking officials, no descendants of wealthy families, or children of wealthy merchants here. Even if they were here, Chung Myung's age doesn't match up.

So, who was this child that was drinking alcohol alone in Hua-Um?

"*Cough*."

The child coughed and waved his hand.

"I'm just a passerby. Don't worry about me and continue with your meal."

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"A passerby."

Baek Cheon's eyes softened.

"Right, that was also possible. Alright, then. Since we ended up meeting here, why don't we introduce ourselves? I am Baek Cheon, second-class disciple of the Great Mount Hua."

Chung Myung grunted a little as he covered his face with his long sleeves.

' *Ugh*, this bastard! Why is he so persistent?'

He couldn't back out or beat him up now.

If the fact that Chung Myung had beaten Baek Cheon so that he could run away spread around Mount Hua, then the sect leader would be enraged, and Un Geom, who began to nag him a lot these days, might run wild and try to cut Chung Myung down.

Then, everything Chung Myung had built up would come crumbling down.

‘I can’t let that happen.’

He can’t let himself get tangled up with this young man for no reason. Chung Myung coughed twice.

“I really don’t have a name worth offering…”

“Isn’t it a bit ungentlemanly to cover your face while having a conversation?”

‘Gentleman? What gentleman? You should just leave me alone, you bastard!’

Chung Myung’s emotions were slowly overwhelming him. For now, the first thing he needed to do was avoid further interaction.

Chung Myung quietly got up.

“Well, I need to leave.”

“Hold on.”

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“Let’s have a talk the next time we meet.”

Chung Myung, who was turning around, smiled as he grabbed the alcohol bottle on the table and bowed with his face half-covered.

“Goodbye.”

“Young man. I would like to speak with you a bit longer.”

“I’m sorry, I have no interest in playing with men. Farewell.”

As Chung Myung rushed to the entrance, Baek Cheon’s expression went stiff, and he quickly stretched out his hand.

‘Where does he think he’s going!?’

The moment his hand went to grab the hem of Chung Myung’s clothes.

Swoosh.

Chung Myung smoothly side-stepped his grasp and avoided Baek Cheon’s hand, which merely cut through the air.

“*Huh?* ”

“Take care!”

Chung Myung jumped out of the window next to the table and left.

Baek Cheon looked at the place Chung Myung had left with blank eyes.

‘He avoided it?’

He definitely used the Grasping Joint Lock at the last moment. Even if it didn’t reach the pinnacle, it was still enough to catch a child.

But it was avoided?

“Sahyung. Why didn’t you catch him?”

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“…What?”

“Didn’t you let him go?”

A look of embarrassment appeared on Baek Cheon’s face.

How should he answer this?

“…holding a young child against their will isn’t something a Taoist should do.”

“As expected from Sahyung. *Haha*.”

Baek Cheon put on an awkward smile.

‘There must have been some mistake.’

He must have been tired from the long journey, or maybe he was too relieved by the fact that he came back to Mount Hua.

There was no way he could have lost that child if he had seriously used the technique.

“I thought there were more people in Hua-Um, and now there are many faces I’ve never seen before.”

“Hua-Um isn’t a small place, so there’s no way we could know everyone. If there is a chance, we might meet again.”

“Yes, Sahyung.”

Baek Cheon smiled and went back to his seat. But his smile wasn’t as bright as before.

“*Ugh!* What rotten timing!”

Chung Myung kicked a stone lying on the road.

“Why did he have to come there and make a fuss! There were a lot of other people

around! Anyway, have I run out of luck? Even the weakest bastards come to step on my toes!”

How unfortunate.

When he thought of the food he didn’t get to finish eating, his stomach hurt. How much money did he waste!?

“At least I saved the alcohol.”

As he climbed up to Mount Hua, Chung Myung continued to drink from the bottle.

“*Ah*, it lingers on the tongue.”

‘If only there were snacks to go along with this. ‘

Chung Myung smacked his lips and threw away the empty bottle.

“*Ah*. Climbing a mountain is so difficult.”

No matter how many times he climbed the mountain, it seemed like he could never get used to it.

‘But that Baek Cheon kid… ’

Suddenly, a group of people outside of Chung Myung’s plans appeared. Of course, their presence didn’t bother him, but…

‘It might get a little annoying.’

Chung Myung’s life has been so comfortable on Mount Hua because of the preferential treatment he got for his achievements. But that wasn’t all.

The biggest reason was the age difference between the elders and the third-class disciples.

Compared to the elders, who were all over fifty years old, the third-class disciples were children below twenty. This gave them a bit of leeway to work and train.

The scariest person for a soldier in the army isn't the general or the emperor. It is his

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immediate supervisor. Isn't it common sense that a corrupt boss with a short temper is more frightening than a distant mastermind?

There wouldn't be anyone that would think otherwise.

"*Ugh.* Baek Cheon *huh*."

First of all, it seemed strange.

"*Heh*. I shouldn't have laughed back there."

But he couldn't control it.

The words he heard from Baek Cheon were so absurd.

"Overtake the Southern Edge Sect?"

On what basis?

Chung Myung clicked his tongue over and over.

If only those idiots, who ran their mouths, could at least defeat the third-class disciples of the Southern Edge Sect.

“Oh my, Sahyung. In this era, just look at these fools that are considered disciples of Mount Hua. Seriously, kids these days! *Phew!* ”

Chung Myung was more shocked than when he saw the state of the third-class disciples.

How much martial arts could the third-class disciples even learn? They wouldn’t have even gotten a clear taste of what martial arts is, so it wouldn’t matter.

But the second-class disciples are different.

The third-class disciples are taught the foundation, second-class disciples grow through training, first-class disciples reach the peak, and when they become an elder, it is natural for them to complete their own martial arts path.

Right… that is the standard.

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“Oh, my God.”

Chung Myung took a deep breath.

When he saw the second-class disciples, Chung Myung felt his stomach-turning.

However, they were also disciples of Mount Hua, so Chung Myung should embrace them…

“I shouldn’t be wasting my precious time like this.”

Seeing the second-class disciples, an unknown sense of urgency grew in him.

“*Ugh*. How much longer will I have to wait for these disciples to grow into competent martial artists?”

It was still a very, very long way off.

“Jo Gul sahyung! All the third-class disciples have been asked to gather!”

“Why?”

“Our seniors are returning.”

“Well, okay. Did you tell Great Sahyung?”

“Yes! He said he’ll be there soon.”

“Okay.”

Jo Gul took off his training clothes and changed into new ones.

The sunset was approaching.

‘Come to think of it, I wonder if he’s back yet.’

Jo Gul opened the door, went out, and opened the door to Chung Myung’s room.

“*Kuha… ugh*…!”

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“…”

When he saw Chung Myung on the bed, Jo Gul was left speechless. He was lying down in a weird way and mumbling in his sleep…

“Did he seriously get drunk!?”

Where was the smell of alcohol coming from?

Flustered, Jo Gul ran to Chung Myung, grabbed him by the shoulders, and shook him.

“Chung Myung! Sajae! Chung Myung! You crazy basta—”

“*Huh?* ”

“—ah, nothing. Forget that last one.”

He kept shaking him.

“Everyone was asked to gather, the Sasuks are back. You should quickly wash up, you look terrible right now.”

“*Ahhh.* ”

Chung Myung stretched himself out.

“I guess I dozed off for a bit when I took that break.”

‘That wasn’t a break!’

Chung Myung, no creature in the world would sleep the way you did. Just say you got drunk and fell asleep.

“You, wash up first…”

“*Ugh!* ”

Chung Myung released a little qi and quickly scattered the scent of alcohol. Jo Gul, with his eyes wide open, was about to say something…

‘ *Huh?* ’

That overwhelming smell of alcohol disappeared in an instant. Jo Gul sniffed, just to be sure, but he couldn’t smell anything.

“*Uh?* Why don’t I smell the alcohol anymore?”

“Alcohol? What is wrong with you? We walk the path of purity, Sahyung, why would we have such things? We would get punished.”

“…No? I definitely…”

“Let’s go. We might be punished if we’re late.”

Jo Gul felt that the situation was a bit unfair, but Chung Myung was right about being late for now, so he hurriedly followed after him.

“But why do we need to go greet the seniors just because they’re returning?”

“We need to at least welcome them back. They are returning from a long and arduous training session.”

Arduous?

Do they think that staying in some closed space would promote growth?

They probably just went and locked themselves in some building or cave with no light for two or three months, ate fasting pills, and swung their swords a few times.

They probably thought to themselves…

‘Ah, I got so much training done.’

How pointless.

‘A bunch of young men and women, isolated in pairs, wielding swords or whatever.

Such cheeky training. Yet, they arrogantly ran their mouths about how difficult it was and how they can overtake Southern Edge with just that.’

It wasn’t like that back in Chung Myung’s day!

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It was inconceivable for such a thing to happen in Mount Hua a hundred years ago.

“They said they’d take down the Southern Edge sect bastards no matter what. This time, they really are coming back with great results. Even the sect leader wholeheartedly supported their training.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. Baek Cheon Sasuk strongly requested it.”

Chung Myung snorted.

“Sure, sure.”

“You should also be careful of your attitude. Baek Cheon Sasuk is strict, so if you behave like you usually do, you’ll get in trouble.”

“Sure, sure.”

“I meant it.”

“Sure, sure.”

Leaving Jo Gul, who was nagging him, Chung Myung joined the third-class disciples.

By the time Chung Myung arrived, quite a few people were already gathered.

The sect leader, elders, and the Un sasuks too. Everyone stood at the gate, waiting for the second-class disciples to return.

“They’re coming.”

“Open the gate!”

The newly built gate opened to the left and right. Soon, Mount Hua’s second-class disciples entered the scene, draped in black robes.

“*Oh!* ”

“Look at the change in atmosphere.”

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“It’s really amazing.”

The Un sasuks admired them and applauded. The elders also welcomed them with happy faces.

There was only one person with a dull face.

‘When will this end?’

Chung Myung wanted to go eat.

Baek Cheon, who led the disciples, responded to everyone with a dazzling smile.

‘Wow, look at this.’

Indeed, this disciple was unquestionably handsome.

Of course, even Chung Myung had people who called him handsome in the past.

When he got dressed up and went down to Hua-Um, beautiful women would fall—

– Have some conscience.

‘ *Oh*, come on Sahyung!’

Chung Myung shook his head and was just about to clap.

“*Huh?* ”

Baek Cheon’s eyes, which accepted the others’ greetings, fell on Chung Myung. Baek Cheon, who paused for a moment, tilted his head.

After watching Chung Myung for a long time, he arrived in front of Chung Myung and smiled with confused eyes.

“By any chance…”

Baek Cheon smiled and stared straight at Chung Myung as he spoke.

“Haven’t we met before? Young man?”

“…”

Was he going to get caught this time?

‘Do I really need to beat the hell out of this guy?’

Baek Cheon smiled brightly with that handsome face.

It wasn’t a perfectly handsome face, but it had a unique magnetism that attracted others to him.

‘What a familiar feeling, it reminds me a bit of the past.’

Chung Myung experienced the same feeling from people of the Shaolin sect.

Of course, this idiot couldn’t be compared to them. But in Mount Hua, where there were many normal people, this feeling was weirdly out of place. It made him wonder why he was even here, in the ruined Mount Hua.

More problematic was that this man was trying to bite at Chung Myung’s ankles and hang off them.

“What are you talking about?”

For now, just act like you don’t know.

“You don’t know?”

“I have no idea.”

“*Ah*, is that so?”

Baek Cheon tilted his head slightly. Rather than acting confused, he tried to act in a way that would provoke Chung Myung into admitting the truth.

“That’s quite strange. I feel like I’ve seen your face before. When did you join us?”

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The answer came from Yoon Jong and not Chung Myung.

“Sasuk, this child entered while you were all away from Mount Hua. So, you couldn’t have met him.”

“Is that so? I see.”

Baek Cheon smiled brightly.

“You seem like you are close to each other. As Great Sahyung, it’s good that you are taking care of the youngest. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes, sasuk.”

Yoon Jong answered with an awkward timbre. As if Baek Cheon discovered something from that answer, he nodded his head.

“It seems like this was a fateful meeting. It’s only our first meeting, but you seem so familiar to me. I think we’ll see each other in the future quite often. What is your name?”

“Chung Myung.”

“I am Baek Cheon. Be sure to remember my name.”

Then rang a firm voice.

“How can you leisurely have a chat over there when the sect leader is waiting for you!?”

“*Ah*, I’m sorry! I’m coming.”

Baek Cheon bowed towards Un Geom. He then turned and joined his other mates as they advanced ahead.

Jo Gul watched Chung Myung and whispered.

“Have you met Baek Cheon sasuk before?”

“No.”

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Even if he did, the answer is no.

“Be careful. Baek Cheon Sasuk is a second-class disciple. He’s a great man.”

“Great?”

“Yes.”

Yoon Jong added to Jo Gul’s words.

“He’s known to be the savior of Mount Hua. A person said to have the potential to rebuild the crumbling Mount Hua.”

“Savior?”

Didn’t this phrase seem like something Chung Myung heard a lot in the past? When did he…? *Ah*, back when he first arrived on Mount Hua, people often used to say such things about him.

Although Chung Myung quickly turned from the savior into the most mischievous gossip topic of Mount Hua.

“Wasn’t Jo Gul the sect’s best genius?”

“What are you saying!? Someone might hear you!”

Jo Gul’s face turned bright red at those words.

“Baek Cheon sasuk isn’t someone I can compare to.”

“Yes. Yes. A loser mentality is good. Having a sense of defeat makes people look humble too.”

“*Huh?* ”

“Nothing, Sahyung.”

Chung Myung looked at Baek Cheon, who was walking ahead.

‘Seems like a crane mixed in with a flock of hens.’

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It sounds like a good thing. A very good thing.

But in reality, it isn’t a very nice thing to say.

A crane is a crane. It doesn’t make sense for a crane to be among the flock of hens.

And in most cases…

‘He has a flaw.’

While Chung Myung curiously looked at Baek Cheon, Yoon Jong continued to explain.

“Actually, it’s said that Baek Cheon sasuks’ sword techniques have reached the pinnacle. I heard that the elders have high expectations of him. Even though he’s young, he is a genius.”

“Hm.”

Perhaps, among the second-class disciples of Mount Hua, Baek Cheon was the most important.

‘And that’s very annoying.’

Chung Myung had also gone through this in the past.

Why were there so many things to learn? The other disciples would train moderately and then go to bed, but the elders would always latch onto Chung Myung and brush him up on other techniques too. Even Sahyung… no. There was nothing that his Sahyung didn’t involve him in.

But it was worth it.

It’s said the prestige of a sect is built over a long history, but the rise and fall of anything can often depend on a single person.

Even if it’s only a small or medium-sized sect, if they can produce a famous master, then people will flock to them in hopes of joining the same sect. On the other hand, no matter how long a sect has existed or how proud their history and traditions are, they are destined to stagnate and decline if they fail to produce any reputable masters.

The only way for the dying Mount Hua to rise again is to produce a powerful genius.

If just one mighty warrior exists within the sect, the entire situation can be reversed.

‘Of course, that was the plan until I arrived.’

Now what, though?

There is a lot of money.

“Don’t the sasuks look strong?”

“Tell me about it. I don’t know if we can ever catch up to them.”

“So cool and strong.”

Chung Myung looked at the two, who were talking to each other with blank eyes.

‘Are these idiots’ eyes for decoration?’

Fine, let’s call them cool even without seeing anything. People’s tastes are diverse, and Chung Myung was a good person who didn’t impose his tastes on others.

But ‘looking strong’ and ‘being strong’ were not the same.

‘If these disciples are considered strong, then nobody would be considered weak!’

“Looking at Sasuk’s level, Sahyungs would be able to win.”

At Chung Myung’s words, Jo Gul dumbfoundedly smiled like it wasn’t a funny joke.

“What nonsense.”

“… *uh*, right.”

Sahyung.

My Sahyung.

I have to live here listening to such words on a daily basis. If you have any conscience, come down and say something! Am I meant to live here unfairly like

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this?

It was often said that people who ascend to the other world come to visit our world and give advice. Then Sahyung, who was known to be the icon of virtue, can come and advise something, right?

Right?

Won’t he listen to Chung Myung?

Come on!!

While Chung Myung was having a conversation with his Sahyung, the second-class disciples lined up.

“*Huh?* ”

Just then, someone ran to join the lineup of second-class disciples from within the sect’s grounds.

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

‘Right, that one is also a Baek disciple.’

Yu… what was her name? Yu something.

He was entangled in a strange relationship with her, so he ended up paying a little attention to her. Surely, she couldn't have told anyone about their meeting before, right?

When Chung Myung frowned while looking at Yu Yiseol, Jo Gul smiled insidiously.

"Come to think of it, this is your first time seeing senior Yu."

"What?"

"Right. Yu Yiseol. Anyone who sees her for the first time can't take their eyes off her.

That's how beautiful she is."

"Great Sahyung."

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"*Huh?* "

"Do you have any cinnamon powder with you?"

"Why?"

"I want to spray some on my ears. I feel like my ears are bleeding from listening to Jo Gul sahyung."

He couldn't help but feel like this.

Yoon Jong nodded his head.

“It’s been a while since we both agreed on something. Well, I will give some to you later.”

“Thank you.”

Jo Gul’s expression grew distorted.

“Did I say anything wrong? It’s because there aren’t many who know about senior Yu. She’s probably the most beautiful woman in Shaanxi.”

Listening to Jo Gul repeat himself like a parrot, Chung Myung took a deep breath.

“You are known to be the best in Mount Hua, and she is the most beautiful around? If someone who doesn’t know our situation hears you, they’ll think that her and you are up to no good.”

“But that’s the truth.”

Jo Gul pointed to Yu Yiseol.

“Isn’t she pretty?”

“*Sigh*…”

Before Chung Myung could answer, Jo Gul continued.

“But don’t dream much. Senior Yu already has Baek Cheon in her heart.”

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“…Sahyung.”

“Yes.”

Chung Myung sighed deeply,

“Instead of wasting your time being interested in someone else’s love life, wouldn’t you have already made a name for yourself if you had just spent that time training?”

“You aren’t supposed to stab people with truth like that.”

“Just stop talking.”

Chung Myung looked at Jo Gul as if he was pathetic and turned away.

Looking back, she did say that she was his senior; apparently, that seemed to be correct.

Chung Myung looked back at Yu Yiseol.

When all the Baek disciples lined up, the sect leader, who was watching them, smiled warmly.

“You’ve all worked hard. The training must have been excruciating, right?”

Baek Cheon began to speak on behalf of the others.

“Sect leader. It wasn’t difficult at all. Our training was done with the support we got from the sect, so how can we call it difficult?”

“And the results?”

Baek Cheon smiled.

“We managed to realize that the path of the sword is endless in life. However, we have returned with achievements great enough that we would laugh in the face of our former selves.”

“That’s a good thing.”

Hyun Jong looked at Hyung Young.

“Finance head.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

“Now that the children of Mount Hua have returned from their hard training, shouldn’t we celebrate their return?”

“*Tsk*. What nonsen— *ah*, no, it’s nothing. Of course, we should.”

“…”

Hyun Jong stared at him with a subtle gaze.

‘This man is becoming more strange by the day.’

To be precise, the frequency of saying strange things had increased dramatically since the Eunha Guild arrived. It was hard to tell for sure, but it felt like the tight reins around him had finally gone loose.

“Well, we have it prepared in the meal room. It should be enough for everyone.”

“I see.”

Hyun Jong looked at the second-class disciples.

“There are many things I want to say, but it wouldn’t do to hold you here after your long journey back. Since I don’t want to keep you here, let’s head inside.”

“…sect leader. With all due respect, may I ask you one thing?”

Hyun Jong wanted to clear this crowd quickly, but Baek Cheon didn't seem to notice.

"Feel free to ask."

"The scenery here seems to have changed a lot since the last time we were here, I was wondering what happened."

"Good things happened. Thanks to that, I was able to restore everything in the sect."

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It was a soft but firm answer. After hearing that, it was hard to ask what the 'good'

thing was.

"You might have a lot of questions, but we also have a lot of time ahead of us. So, we can take this slowly."

"Yes, Sect leader."

"Un Am."

"Yes."

Un Am, who was on Hyun Jong's side, came forward.

"Please look after these children who have suffered for so long."

"Yes, sect leader."

Hyun Jong nodded and turned his head.

"Chung Myung!"

“…”

Chung Myung’s face contorted.

‘No, does that man really have to call me like this day after day?’

There shouldn’t be any work today.

“Yes! Sect leader!’

Chung Myung walked out,

“Come to my room for a while. I have something to discuss.”

“Again?”

Baek Cheon, who was watching this unfold, was shocked.

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‘Again…?’

He spoke like that to the sect leader?

Baek Cheon doubted whether he had heard correctly or not. But it didn’t seem like he was mistaking the words because all the second-class disciples had the same expression on their faces.

However, he didn’t understand why the third-class disciples didn’t seem to discipline this child.

It wouldn’t be wrong even if this child was harshly hit for behaving like that to the sect leader!

But even the sect leader was smiling despite those words.

“How about if I prepare some snacks?”

“Okay. I get it. I will come.”

Hyun Jong led Chung Myung to his residence with a happy face.

Baek Cheon, who silently observed the scene, looked incredulously at Un Geom and asked.

“Sasuk. That child, just who is he?”

“Well.”

Un Geom smiled.

“I think it would be good for your mental health to not pay much attention to him.”

“What?”

“Especially if it’s you.”

Un Geom shrugged his shoulders and turned.

“Unpack your belongings and come to the meal room. Don’t be late.”

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“…Yes.”

Baek Cheon felt a strange feeling again. Only this time, the sense of incompatibility felt much greater.

Perhaps, this awkward feeling was simply because he had returned after being away for a while.

But just one thing.

Baek Cheon's eyes turned to follow Chung Myung, who was walking with the sect leader.

"*Hmmm.* "

He narrowed his eyes as he stared in disapproval at the one he didn't like.

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"S-Sahyung!"

"…"

"What is all this? Despite all the hard work we did, no one is praising us…"

Baek Cheon couldn't find the words to respond despite someone talking to him. It was because he, too, was surprised.

Unexpectedly, there was a huge feast in front of them.

From the perspective of the secular world, it may be somewhat lacking to be called a feast. However, for Mount Hua, this seemed no different from what would be eaten by an emperor.

What's more, that.

That! There was that!

“…isn’t that meat?”

“*Uh*.”

Baek Cheon rubbed his eyes.

In front of his eyes was certainly food that had been acquired by killing a living animal and carving its flesh.

How could a pure sect commit such an act?

“Where did the money come from?”

‘I want to know the same!’

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Just where did Mount Hua even get such money? Where did the meat come from?

“W-wait. Sahyung. Come to think of it, the inside of this place has also changed. I thought it might just feel awkward because we’ve been gone for so long, but doesn’t it look shiny and clean?”

“…now that you mention it, yes.”

Baek Cheon looked around. The entire building might not be newly built, but it looked like it had been recently renovated. All the holes in the walls were covered, and the whole place seemed to be fixed cleanly.

“There are new looking halls, and now this place? There’s even meat on the table!”

“…”

“I can’t imagine what happened to Mount Hua while we were away. Unless some God of Wealth descended onto this place.”

Baek Cheon smiled.

God of Wealth? Mount Hua is a sect that the God of Wealth had abandoned.

If any sect could compete with the Beggars Union, it would be Mount Hua.

No, even they might be richer than Mount Hua. Just because the Beggars Union was a group of beggars didn’t mean that the sect itself was poor.

But for Mount Hua to have such wealth?

Why did it seem so out of place?

Baek Cheon lifted his head and slightly looked at Un Geom.

“Sasuk. This food?”

“This is food the finance head prepared to raise your spirits. Eat a lot.”

No, why is he speaking so casually about this?

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Sasuk used to say that he would survive solely on grass, like a rabbit, for the sake of Mount Hua. Where did that Sasuk go, and when did he switch sides like this!?

Even stranger was the reaction of the third-class disciples.

The third-class disciples, who were there to congratulate the second-class disciples, didn't show any surprise at the quality of food placed in front of them.

They just stared at the table sternly.

Baek Cheon listened to their conversation from the side.

"I'm tired of meat, isn't there anything different? Fish or something else."

"Crazy bastard, where will we find fish on the mountains? Do you need to be beaten with a fish to restore your senses?"

What the hell are those idiots talking about?

What? They are tired of meat?

Unable to understand the situation, Baek Cheon, who was frustrated, opened his mouth.

"No…"

"*Ahem*."

"*Hahahahahaha*."

"…"

He was about to open his mouth.

Baek Cheon turned his head to the side to shut the mouths of his mates.

'Let's just eat first.'

'We have money, so we get to eat meat. I was sick of having those pills for the past year.'

Baek Cheon, who felt suppressed by the laughs of the others, opened his mouth.

“Is it alright to start eating, even though the elders and sect leader haven’t arrived yet?”

“*Huh? Ah*, I didn’t notice. Hold a moment.”

“Yes. Thank you.”

Un Geom took his chopsticks and put a piece of meat in his mouth. That was the sign that the others could eat, and the Sahyungs frantically moved their chopsticks.

Papapak!

Food bounced into the air.

But there was nothing to worry about. The chopsticks caught everything in the air because it was precious meat that had to be treasured.

Baek Cheon closed his eyes upon seeing everyone’s behavior; he felt that he was staring deeply into the abyss.

It might look exaggerated to others, but this was a normal reaction. Mount Hua was the poorest sect in the world, and the disciples were the poorest people in the world.

They had only eaten food made with grains and a few nuts in all their time here. To say it politely, they served healthy meals. But truthfully, it was the cheapest diet that could be afforded.

Besides, thanks to their closed-door training, the second-class disciples only had fasting pills for the past year.

Some, like Baek Cheon, could purchase food with money when visiting family.

However, most of the disciples hadn't so much as smelled the scent of meat for years already.

Of course, they were losing control of themselves.

In the meantime, Baek Cheon looked at the third-class disciples leisurely eating their food.

Looking at their nonchalant attitude, he realized that this food was nothing special in the current Mount Hua.

"Sasuk."

Un Geom, who was eating and drinking, turned his head and looked at Baek Cheon.

"What? Does the food suit your taste?"

"It isn't like that… I just really don't understand the situation. Just what happened to Mount Hua in the time we were all away?"

"Right. I didn't think of this from your position."

Un Geom laughed.

"It's too long of a story to tell. You'll find out eventually. All you need to know is that a lucky star rolled into Mount Hua."

“Lucky star?”

It was then.

Kwang!

The door opened wide. The second-class disciples, who were gulping down meat, flinched and stopped at the sudden sound. If anyone could open the door so boldly, it had to be an elder…

‘ *Huh?* ’

‘Are there any elders who are that young?’

‘As if!’

Surprisingly, the one who opened the door was Chung Myung. The child, who followed the sect leader earlier, entered in anger.

“There’s a place to sit here.”

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As Jo Gul slightly raised his hand, Chung Myung bowed to Un Geom and then stomped over to the seat. Those nearby the seat moved away slightly so that he could sit comfortably.

Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes at that sight.

‘They’re taking care of that child?’

Of course, it could happen. If they were polite and good kids.

But the third-class disciples Baek Cheon knew of were quick-witted and violent; the word ‘Good’ didn’t fit well with them.

There was only one reason they would be acting like this.

‘Has that child caught them all in his hand?’

It was unbelievable.

But there was too much visible evidence to deny it. The fact that the seat was left for him, and the seat was in the center, with Yoon Jong and Ju Gul on either side.

Yoon Jong is the Great Sahyung of the third-class disciples, and Jo Gul is the strongest of them.

‘So, he caught them both?’

But how could this child have turned them into his people? And…

‘Why hasn’t Un Geom sasuk said anything?’

It was quite rude to kick the door open. It would be troublesome considering that there were second-class disciples and Un Geom sasuk inside; it would have been appropriate to apologize right away.

Un Geom sasuk greatly values morals and manners, so he would definitely say something. Yet, he was casually eating like he didn’t care.

‘The more I think about it, the less I understand.’

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Baek Cheon shook his head. In his eyes, he looked at Chung Myung talking to the others.

“Why are you so angry again?”

“He wants me to go to the Eunha Guild again.”

“…again?”

“Right! I’m not some messenger!”

Yoon Jong grinned at Chung Myung’s complaint.

“But you liked it at first.”

“That was only the first one or two times, *ugh*.”

Chung Myung scratched his head.

“Fortunately, I only need to visit the branch in Hua-Um. If I had to go to Xian city, I would have fallen dead.”

Seeing Yoon Jong smile and comfort him and Jo Gul chuckle at the side, Baek Cheon became convinced.

‘He has all the third-class disciples in his grasp.’

He wasn’t sure what method was used, but it was certain that Chung Myung had power over them.

‘In many ways.’

Baek Cheon smiled.

Yoon Jong, the Great Sahyung of the third-class disciples, always treated the seniors with respect.

Baek Cheon thought that Yoon Jong would have bowed to someone kind, but Chung Myung didn’t seem to have a kind inclination no matter how Baek Cheon looked at him.

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‘I’ll have to find some time to have a conversation with him.’

While Baek Cheon was curious about the third-class disciples.

“Great Sahyung.”

‘ *Hmm?* ’

“Aren’t you going to eat?”

“Ah, I will.”

Baek Cheon picked up his chopsticks, but he looked around soon after picking them up.

“Where is Yu Samae?”

“Well? She was here a while ago.”

Two disciples looked around.

“She was there until we came into the dining hall.”

“It seems like she went off somewhere.”

Everyone answered indifferently like this happened a lot. But Baek Cheon didn’t like that response.

“Shouldn’t we look for her? This banquet is for all of us who went training. We should wait until we’re all together to have fun and celebrate.”

“But there is no one who can find Yu Samae. If she doesn’t want to be found, we can’t find her.”

“It’ll be a waste of energy, Great Sahyung.”

Baek Cheon’s forehead scrunched together.

“*Umm.* ”

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Those who saw it turned their heads away, feeling uncomfortable and sighing.

Yu Yiseol was a bizarre person; it wasn’t easy to find her unless she wanted to show herself. But since Baek Cheon had this stiff expression, they had to at least pretend to search for her.

‘Sahyung favors Yu Samae too much.’

He was normally a calm person that was fair to others, but he would always lose his composure over any issues involving Yu Yiseol.

‘Well.’

It wasn’t like they couldn’t understand, but it was annoying for them.

At the moment when one of them was about to get up, the shut door opened slowly.

Everyone’s eyes were upon the entrance.

Through the sunlight pouring in through the opened door, a woman walked in with small steps.

“Samae.”

Baek Cheon called.

Yu Yiseol, who came inside, scanned the surroundings as if trying to find someone.

Smiling, Baek Cheon raised his hand.

“Samae, over here…”

Yu Yiseol started to walk, but it was in a direction away from Baek Cheon.

Step! Step!

Yu Yiseol, who walked with a smooth gait, reached her destination and stared intently at the person sitting ahead of her.

Baek Cheon’s eyes twitched.

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Yu Yiseol asked the man in front of her,

“Can I sit here?”

The second-class disciples, especially the men, were shocked enough for their eyes to pop out of their sockets.

‘Did Yu Samae talk to a man?’

‘No. When was the last time we even heard her talk?’

But the shock wasn’t over.

The man she spoke to was Chung Myung. He responded with annoyance written all over his face and waved his hand like shooing away a fly.

“No, you can’t.”

“…then let’s talk for a moment.”

Chung Myung firmly answered.

“No. I don’t want to talk to you. Go away.”

Is he crazy?

The color drained from the faces of the second-class disciples as they reeled in shock.

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‘What the hell is going on here?’

Jo Gul couldn’t come to his senses.

It was the first time Jo Gul saw her from such a close distance; he wondered if there could be any disciple in Mount Hua who didn’t know of Yu Yiseol.

It wasn’t because Jo Gul was a third-class disciple. He had never even heard of her having a friendly conversation with anyone. Despite being a disciple of Mount Hua, Yu Yiseol was known to keep her distance from others.

But now, she was talking to Chung Myung right in front of him. Soon, the piercing glares of the second-class disciples all stabbed into Chung Myung like razor-sharp daggers.

‘Wow, those eyes could really kill people.’

Well, it was all aimed towards Chung Myung, who was next to Jo Gul. But sitting next to him, it felt inevitable that he would be dragged

into the crossfire.

‘Chung Myung, please!’

Be respectful, you bastard!

These are the second-class disciples; what is with that tone?

Despite all that, Chung Myung remained calm. In an atmosphere that felt like something was about to happen, Yu Yiseol whispered softly as if nothing was wrong.

“It’ll only be a minute.”

“I said I’m not interested.”

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“But it really will just take a moment.”

“I said no! Don’t you get what I am saying!?”

Watch the way you talk! Speak politely, you bastard!

Jo Gul ended up pressing on Chung Myung’s thighs without realizing it, causing Chung Myung to turn his head toward him.

“What?”

“… *Uh*…”

You shouldn’t ask that!

Uh… he shouldn’t have asked that in front of his sasuks. He should understand what was happening.

Clicking his tongue, Chung Myung turned his head to Yu Yiseol.

“I have nothing to say or speak about with you.”

“But I have something to tell you.”

“I really don’t want to hear it.”

“It is fine, just one minute. Let’s go outside.”

“No need, can’t you see I’m eating?”

“Then, I’ll wait until you finish.”

The second-class disciples were on the verge of going crazy.

First, they had never seen Yu Yiseol speak so much at once to a younger disciple. No, to be precise, they didn’t remember her ever talking so much with any of the second-class disciples either.

But, didn’t it seem like Yu Yiseol was clinging onto this man?

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Right. The second thing that made them agitated was the attitude of Chung Myung.

‘That crazy son of a bitch…!’

‘Nothing is going to happen now, right?’

‘Doesn’t that bastard have eyes?’

‘He has to be a true Taoist.’

Burning anger and subtle respect were poured onto Chung Myung.

As a Taoist who cultivates and walks the path of Dao, the first thing one must do is stay away from worldly desires. However, Yu Yiseol's existence was one that destroyed that dedication. No matter how well-disciplined a person was, they had no choice but to listen and stray from their path if Yu Yiseol made a request.

Anyone would, seeing her beautiful face and expression.

However, Chung Myung was openly complaining that Yu Yiseol was annoying him.

That was unimaginable for the second-class disciples.

"I said no! I have a lot of work to do. Find someone else."

"I came here for you."

"No, why would—"

It was then.

"*Ahem*."

Although it was low, it was a sound that spread widely after being imbued with qi.

Everyone turned their heads to see Baek Cheon, who steadily got up from his seat and smiled at Chung Myung.

"Chung Myung, was it?"

"Yes."

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A short answer.

But Baek Cheon wasn't angry. In such a situation, showing anger meant that the opponent won.

"I understand that you're tired from visiting the sect leader and taking on various tasks. You're likely even doing work that I'm unaware of. However, since your senior is so kindly requesting your time, don't you think you should hear what she has to say, regardless of how tired you may be?"

Baek Cheon spoke softly to Chung Myung. He thought that it would work out…

"Why?"

Baek Cheon's hand trembled.

Did he hear wrong?

No? So why did he hear the word 'why'?

Shocked, Baek Cheon looked at Chung Myung's expression. Seeing that pouty expression, it didn't seem like he heard it wrong.

Forcing the anger down to calm himself,

'Be calm.'

If he got angry at a third-class disciple, it would reflect negatively on his character.

"Did you say 'why'?"

"Yes."

"There are many reasons. First of all, a person should have manners. There is also a rule which says that you need to respect those above you."

“*Ah*, manners?”

As if he understood, Chung Myung nodded and looked at Yu Yiseol.

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“Senior.”

“Yes?”

“Apologize quickly. He’s saying that you aren’t behaving politely right now.”

“…”

Yu Yiseol raised a finger, pointing to herself.

“Yes. Apologize.”

“Me?”

“*Ugh*, you don’t seem to understand at all.”

Chung Myung explained it.

“This is a party to celebrate the return of the second-class disciples. It’s rude to make use of this gathering to sort out your personal affairs and act individually.”

“*Ah*…”

As if that made sense, Yu Yiseol nodded her head, stood from her seat, and bowed to Baek Cheon.

“I apologize, Sahyung. I didn’t think that far.”

“Ah, no, Samae. That’s not—”

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

Just why did it turn out like this?

And when he tried to open his mouth and manage the situation, Chung Myung spoke again.

“Not to him, you should apologize to Sasuk, since you made a mistake around your senior.”

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“You’re right.”

Yu Yiseol bowed her head again towards Un Geom.

“This disciple was short-sighted.”

Un Geom smiled.

“It is fine now that you understand, so sit down.”

“Yes, Sasuk.”

It was Baek Cheon who ended up getting Yu Yiseol into trouble. He couldn’t figure out what to do.

He was flustered… and it was embarrassing to back down without seeing it through to the end. Aren’t the second and third-class disciples looking at Baek Cheon in anticipation of what he would say?

How could he sit back down when so many were watching him? It would turn him into a joke.

He let out a low, empty cough a couple times and looked at Chung Myung.

‘Oh no.’

‘I need to stop him.’

Jo Gul and Yoon Jong looked at each other.

It was hard to beat Chung Myung with a sword, but it was even harder to beat him with words. This guy had no sense of logic. He would resort to all sorts of sophistry and illogical things if it meant winning.

If the conversation continued, Baek Cheon might end up humiliated in front of them.

So, Chung Myung had to be stopped.

“*Kuahaha!* Sasuk! Congratulations on your return!”

“Isn’t today really great? Since the sasuks have returned from training, it looks like

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we won’t have any problems in the future.”

Jo Gul and Yoon Jong desperately tried to switch the topic.

They didn’t mean to defend Chung Myung. It was simply because they didn’t want to see Mount Hua turn into a mess, with Baek Cheon and Chung Myung fighting on their first meeting.

Baek Cheon glanced at the two of them.

Reflected in their desperate gaze, Baek Cheon opened his mouth with narrowed eyes.

“Chung Myung, was it?”

‘Ah what a persistent guy!’

‘I don’t know. I don’t know anything.’

Understanding that it was impossible to stop him, the two reached out and grabbed the hem of Chung Myung’s robe.

Please, just this once. Just this once in your life, behave politely…

Did he understand their earnestness? Chung Myung opened his mouth.

“You must have had a tough time traveling all the way here.”

Oh?

Yoon Jong and Jo Gul were shocked. How long had it been since such pleasantries came out of Chung Myung’s mouth…?

“You keep asking the same thing over and over. Do you need to go rest?”

… *ehh*, as if his character could change overnight.

Damn that consistent bastard!

Baek Cheon’s eyebrows twitched.

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“I will ask once again. Are you certain that we haven’t met before?”

“Nope, I’ve never seen you before.”

“It will be better if you answer honestly.”

“Hey, I already told you that we’ve never met. Do you think I would deceive you?”

Looking at his glistening eyes, no one would think he was lying.

Except for the third-class disciples.

And Un Geom.

Uh… the second-class disciples might also doubt him. *Uh… Hm*.

“Really? I’ll know if I ask.”

Baek Cheon turned towards Un Geom. He didn’t want to do this, but this was the only way he could regain the upper hand.

“Sasuk. I saw that child in the morning, drinking alcohol at a restaurant in Hua-Um.”

Un Geom’s eyes twitched.

“Really?”

“Yes. As far as I know, it is forbidden for the third-class disciples to leave Mount Hua.

However, it is definitely unforgivable for them to leave behind their uniform and travel in plain apparel down to—”

“It is fine.”

“Yes, I saw… *huh?* ”

Baek Cheon, who bowed his head with clasped hands, lifted his head.

Did he hear it wrong again?

No, what was up with his ears? He keeps hearing the strangest answers…

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“I said, it is fine.”

Baek Cheon looked at Un Geom with a shocked face.

Un Geom was a man who valued manners and discipline above all else. He wasn’t strict simply because he was head of the White Plum Blossom boarding house; his strict personality, which was sensitive to the rules, made him the head of the dorms.

And such a person said that it was fine for a third-class disciple to go down Mount Hua even if it was against the rules?

“S-sasuk?”

“That child is allowed to go down Mount Hua without asking for permission.”

“*Uh*, permission? Who would give a child such permission?”

“The sect leader granted it to him. Have you got an issue with that?”

“S-sect… leader? Really?”

He was so shocked that he had covered his mouth with both his hands. Hearing the tone of Sasuk’s voice, he knew that asking again would be crossing the line.

Somehow, Baek Cheon seemed to be getting off on the wrong foot with everyone today.

“It doesn’t matter.”

Baek Cheon turned to Chung Myung with a shocked gaze.

Nom-nom-nom-nom.

“…”

Chung Myung was quickly moving his chopsticks and inhaling food as if he had no interest in what was happening. Baek Cheon would have been less angry if the child at least looked at him with a sneer, but this indifference was infuriating.

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

‘I’ll see this through to the end!’

He had no intention of backing down.

Baek Cheon opened his mouth again, but then a man came in through the entrance.

It was the finance head, Hyun Young, wearing his usual cold expression. He strode in and looked around.

“We greet the elder.”

“We greet the elder.”

When everyone stood and greeted him, he just waved his hand as if it was annoying.

“Right. Continue having a good time, I shouldn’t have come. I am only here to check it out. Everyone, eat as much as you want and rest in peace. I am leaving. Un Geom, be sure to keep an eye on them so they don’t play too much.”

“Yes. Sasuk.”

Baek Cheon, who was still standing, spoke.

“I have something to say to the elder.”

Hyun Young, who was about to walk out, turned and looked at him.

“What is it?”

“I apologize, but I saw a third-class disciple drinking alcohol down the Hua-Um today.”

“Alcohol?”

“Yes!”

Hyun Young’s face contorted.

“A third-class disciple drinking!? Are you sure you saw it with your own eyes?”

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“Definitely. He denies that it was him, but I surely saw correctly.”

Baek Cheon slightly covered his face to hide the smile under his hands.

It might seem impolite, but that child was the one who provoked him first. So, he had to resort to something like this.

“Who is the disciple you saw?”

Baek Cheon turned to Chung Myung. He was pretending to be calm, but Baek Cheon was sure that Chung Myung was dying inside.

‘Don’t blame me for this.’

This is to set the rules straight in Mount Hua.

“The third-class disciple, Chung Myung.”

“…Who?”

“Chung Myung. That one over there.”

When it comes to the elders, they couldn’t know each of the third-class disciples by name, so Baek Cheon pointed to the child.

Hyun Young, who looked at Chung Myung, frowned. Then, opened his mouth in irritation with anger rising up.

“What about it?”

“Yes. That Chung Myung drank… *huh?* ”

“What about it?”

“…”

What?

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“E-elder?”

Baek Cheon stared in stupefaction while Hyun Young looked at him with dissatisfaction.

‘Did I say something wrong?’

Baek Cheon rushed to clarify and repair this situation.

“It’s wrong for a third-class disciple to go down to Hua-Um village and drink alcohol.

Although the child was given the authority, by the sect leader, to descend at will, was he given permission to drink alcohol too? I don’t think he understands what he did.”

Hyun Young’s face twisted again.

‘He seems to have understood it clearly this time.’

And immediately…

“You’re someone who doesn’t understand words.”

“…What?”

Hyun Young spoke without even trying to hide his anger.

“Did you set the rules for Mount Hua?”

“H-How could I?”

“Then was there any rule in Mount Hua that prohibits one from drinking when they’re outside the sect?”

“…”

Baek Cheon couldn’t bring himself to answer that question.

No, there was no such rule.

After all, what kind of sect would create a rule that forbids drinking?

But a Taoist should have a sense of propriety!

“And.”

Hyun Young looked at Baek Cheon.

“What about it?”

“…Elder?”

“What’s wrong with having a couple drinks?”

“…”

Why did it seem like Hyun Young’s face kept growing redder and angrier?

That wasn’t all.

Eventually, Hyun Young’s face turned beet red as he pointed at Baek Cheon.

“There are so many bastards who can’t even pay for what they eat here! But the guy who feeds you, goes out and has some alcohol with his own money!? Huh? What do you think you are!? Do you think you can abuse your privilege as sasuk to torment him!?”

‘What? S-sasuk?’

“You’re eating meat with the money he earned! Now, he goes down and wants to have a drink with the money he saved up! But you can’t stand it, so you come to me to snitch on him!?”

Baek Cheon floundered with a stiff face.

It was difficult to understand; why was Hyun Young cursing at him? Was this really

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just for saying that he saw a third-class disciple drinking?

Is this really elder Hyun Young? Supposedly, he was meant to join the North Sea Ice Palace but ended up in Mount Hua, unable to fully demonstrate his skills. However, he was always known to be calm and cold; is this really the same man?

Seeing Hyung Young, wide-eyed and yelling, it was hard to tell if this was a dream or not.

“If you’re really so bothered by it, go down to Hua-Um and make some money… but no! You sit around gaining a reputation just for being a disciple and use your privilege as sasuk to bully him! Swinging swords and meditating all day isn’t going to bring any money or food to the table! Your mind! Use your mind and do something worthwhile! Should I open that head of yours and make something useful out of you!? What did you people even do to earn the meat on the tabl—”

Bang!

At that moment, someone violently slammed the door and entered.

“*Hahaha!* Here you are!”

A very strangely smiling face appeared as Hyun Sang covered the mouth of Hyun Young from behind.

“*Eup! Eup! Eup!…* let go of… *eup!* ”

“*Haha.* Let’s go outside for a while. To a place away from the kids. *Ah*, stay still!”

Tah!

The sound of the door closing left the dining hall with a strange silence. No one could open their mouths.

Nom-nom-nom-nom.

In that awkward silence, there was only one sound they could hear, the sound of something being eaten.

“What…”

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Baek Cheon mumbled.

“Just what happened here?”

It was a statement that represented the feelings of all the second-class disciples.

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“Isn’t it too strange? Sahyung?”

Despite the question being directed at him, Baek Cheon just silently set down the teacup in his hand. It was an old teacup that he had been using for a long time.

Before he went into closed-door training, he thought that this cup had its own charm. But looking at it now, it seemed more pathetic than elegant.

After all, this was the true state of Mount Hua.

Old furniture, old buildings, and old people.

The only hope of the worn-out sect were the disciples, and among them, their greatest hope was Baek Cheon.

However, Baek Cheon returned after a year away, and now his ‘hope’ seemed irrelevant to them.

“It’s strange that new buildings were suddenly built, and it’s strange that areas of the sect which were neglected for over a decade are repaired, no… I mean, that’s a good thing. We couldn’t do any of it before because the sect didn’t have the funds. But!”

Baek Sang spoke in a strong tone, unable to hold back his anger.

“Isn’t the behavior of the elders too strange? We came back from such a long and arduous training, but the sect leader didn’t say much.”

“Didn’t the sect leader praise you enough for your effort?”

“Still, it’s been a year since we’ve been away…”

“He is a man who is eager for change.”

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Baek Sang bowed his head slightly. Thinking about it, the sect leader really didn’t say much. But it didn’t make sense to call him out like that.

“Sect leader could be fine, but wasn’t Elder Hyun Young or even Un Geom Sasuk acting the same?”

Baek Cheon didn’t respond. No matter what anyone said, it was truly bizarre. It wasn’t like they were dissatisfied with their elders, but their treatment was strange.

“Didn’t you feel it? The elders were all taking that child’s side.”

“Baek Sang.”

“Yes, Sahyung!”

“I am not that ignorant.”

“…”

How could he not understand when he was cursed and yelled at, right to his face?

“Sahyung. That kid, he is quite cocky, isn’t he?”

“*Hmm?* ”

“Even if the elders take his side, shouldn’t he at least bow his head when we, his direct seniors, come back? But that one…”

Baek Sang went silent after that.

If only that child had sneered or laughed at them, they could have called him out properly, but they couldn’t do anything about his indifference.

“*Phew.* ”

Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes.

“And I don’t understand why Yu Samae is so interested in him. Why, just why…”

A small ripple occurred in Baek Cheon’s teacup as his hand lightly trembled.

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“It could be that Yu Samae had some reason.”

“But she barely speaks with us. I’ve never seen her talk so actively with anyone until now, and it isn’t like we’ve only spent one or two days with her, right?”

“…”

“Leaving us aside, at least Sahyung—”

“Baek Sang.”

“—Yes, Sahyung.”

“Don’t get too angry.”

Baek Sang bowed his head and glanced at Baek Cheon’s eyes.

Baek Cheon tried to manage his expression, but it was inevitable that he would show a bit of how uncomfortable he felt. His eyes kept twitching, and he struggled to hold back a frown.

‘I lost to that young boy.’

Not even a full saint or an elder?

The difference of level between disciples within sects like Mount Hua is akin to heaven and earth. Just like how the Baek disciples couldn’t

speak against the Un disciples, Chung Myung also shouldn't be able to speak against them.

'Cheeky bastard.'

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

At that moment, Baek Sang, who bowed, continued.

"I apologize. It's just unfair. We returned after such difficult training, but the elders didn't recognize our efforts; and that snake-like bastard, who appeared out of nowhere, is taking over the sect by playing cute with the elders, right?"

"The time where we could play cute with the elders has already passed."

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"You know that's not what I meant."

He knew. He knew it too well.

Baek Cheon let out a low sigh.

'It's a feeling of subtly being taken over.'

Were they away for too long?

In the past, as soon as they returned, the adults would have greeted them warmly and then come to visit Baek Cheon later. Now, they barely showed interest in him.

Instead, they were all looking for Chung Myung.

Baek Cheon was unhappy over the sudden change in status.

He didn’t know what Chung Myung did to have such great expectations from the elders and receive their protection, but Mount Hua was his sect.

Baek Cheon was the only one who received the expectations of Mount Hua’s elders, and he had to be the guiding light that would return the sect to brilliance.

“Are you going to leave him like this?”

“What more can we do?”

“…shouldn’t we at least beat it into him or discipline him? If we leave it as it is, Mount Hua will be a mess. Sahyung should establish order and set him right.”

Baek Cheon smiled bitterly.

He didn’t like when his juniors talked back to him, but he wasn’t the kind to beat sense into others.

“Calm down for now.”

“Sahyung!”

Baek Sang raised his voice which made Baek Cheon frown. Seeing that, Baek Sang

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sighed and lowered his eyes.

Seeing that reaction, Baek Cheon nodded with a satisfied face.

“It’s not that I don’t want to.”

“Then why…”

“There are things we need to know first.”

“*Huh?* ”

Baek Cheon shook his head and set the teacup down.

“There is a proper order we must follow. Don’t you think it’s necessary to know why the elders are all fawning over that child?”

“Ah, right. We should do that.”

“He’s coming.”

“Who?”

As soon as Baek Cheon finished, someone knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

Kik.

With the sound of the door opening, the person who entered bowed.

“Disciple Yoon Jong is here.”

“Welcome.”

Baek Cheon pointed ahead of him.

“Sit down.”

“Yes, Sasuk.”

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Yoon Jong cautiously sat down. He couldn't be sure if he should sit or not despite the offer.

Baek Cheon liked Yoon Jong's attitude.

'This is how things should be.'

Not behaving like that other bastard.

Baek Cheon, who was relaxed, spoke in a soft voice.

"Yoon Jong."

"Yes, sasuk."

"While I was away, you must have had a hard time trying to serve the elders and handle the disciples."

"I just did what I was supposed to do as a disciple of Mount Hua."

"Yes, you're right. That is a natural action. But…"

Baek Cheon paused for a moment, which made Yoon Jong lift his head to examine his expression, and then the expected words followed.

"It seems like strange things are happening in Mount Hua right now."

"…are you talking about Chung Myung?"

Baek Cheon didn't respond, but Yoon Jong knew what he aimed for.

"It is my fault for not leading that sajae properly. If you are angry, please punish me, sasuk."

"No, it's not something you could handle. What I am saying is…"

Baek Cheon smiled.

“Tell me all of what happened while I was away. I’ll listen to your story and decide what to do next.”

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Yoon Jong sighed deeply.

‘It’s natural for me to explain this to Sasuk, but it feels like I’m betraying Chung Myung.’

Before coming here, Yoon Jong had already told Chung Myung. He asked if he could tell everything to the sasuk who called him. And Chung Myung’s answer was simple.

- Go.

“…”

It would have been nice if he had given some instructions.

Yoon Jong glanced at Baek Cheon for a moment and then spoke.

“First, I think I should begin from the time Chung Myung entered Mount Hua.”

As Yoon Jong began to slowly unravel his story, the disciples listened to him with bated breath.

And as the story continued, Baek Cheon’s face gradually distorted more and more.

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Once the story was complete, no one spoke.

Everyone looked at Yoon Jong's face with a serious expression, like they had fallen into trouble.

It was Baek Cheon that broke the long silence.

"So, that child…"

"Yes, Sasuk."

"Discovered the treasure and lost martial arts books of the sect."

"Yes."

"And found a ledger which brought to light the affairs of the businesses under Mount Hua and helped confiscate back the businesses?"

"Right."

"In addition, he even cured the illness of the Eunha Merchant Guild's Elder Hwang?"

"Yes."

"In return, Eunha offered to take care of Mount Hua's finances… and Hua-Um."

Yoon Jong nodded without saying a word.

Thinking back, it was strange. Hua-Um had a life that didn't exist when they first left for their training.

Since they were away from Mount Hua for so long, he just assumed that Hua-Um had improved greatly during their time away, but that

wasn’t it.

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“…right.”

Baek Cheon opened his mouth but closed it again.

“I get it.”

“Yes, Sasuk. Then, I’ll take my leave.”

“Alright.”

As Yoon Jong left the room, Baek Cheon had a serious look on his face; and the others in the room also had sullen expressions.

“No, just what…”

Baek Sang opened his mouth, feeling frustrated and despondent.

“Then, doesn’t this mean that one child solved all of Mount Hua’s problems by himself?”

“…”

Shock and consternation could be heard in this disciple’s voice.

Baek Cheon couldn’t even respond.

The biggest problem with Mount Hua was neither their martial arts nor the small number of disciples. Mount Hua collapsed so quickly because they lacked the money to support themselves.

‘It wasn’t just that they didn’t have money.’

There was an enormous debt.

When he left for training, Baek Cheon's greatest worry was returning after a year only to find the sect abandoned and destroyed.

But Chung Myung solved this issue.

"It's understandable why the elders like him."

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Baek Sang laughed in self-derision at Baek Cheon's words.

"Hearing elder Hyun Young yell at everyone about eating meat from that child's money, I thought he was the child of a great merchant, and that he was giving Mount Hua a lot of money. but this…"

He was literally feeding Mount Hua.

Baek Cheon shook his head.

'There's no answer to solve this problem.'

If Baek Cheon was in Hyun Young's position, he would have defended Chung Myung himself. That was how significant Chung Myung's contribution was. He was a child that raised money like a god of fortune and solved all of Mount Hua's financial woes, even the problems which persisted for decades with no resolution in sight.

It's a good thing Hyun Young didn't have children. If his child got into an argument with Chung Myung, his house would be a mess if he kept taking Chung Myung's side.

He could always have another kid, but where in this world would he find another person like Chung Myung?

“…Sahyung, this…”

“*Umm*.”

Baek Cheon racked his mind, thinking heavily.

“If he had only solved one of the sect’s problems it would have ended with ‘he made a contribution’. But that child is intertwined with the Eunha Guild. As long as he has a connection with Eunha, which manages Mount Hua’s finances, and Mount Hua makes money from that relationship, Chung Myung’s position will continue to rise.”

At least for the foreseeable future.

“…but at some point, wouldn’t his importance settle as the sect grows?”

“Right. But will that moment come soon? As you know, this is all…”

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Gold falling into a beggar’s lap.

It was good to see and good to touch. Even if it wasn’t used right away, wouldn’t you be happy just to possess it?

Chung Myung was the one who gave gold to the beggar known as Mount Hua. No matter how hard Baek Cheon tried, he couldn’t achieve anything like this.

‘I can see why the sect leader would meet with that child alone.’

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

When he returned from training, he thought that he would receive looks of adoration and approval from all the elders, but a guy who

popped out of nowhere stole away the spotlight and received all of the elders' expectations that should have belonged to Baek Cheon.

It was an issue that couldn't be ignored.

"Is it really such a big deal?"

Baek Mun, who only listened to the conversation till then, spoke.

"The discovery of Mount Hua's treasure was just a coincidence, and wasn't it pure luck that he treated elder Hwang?"

"Sajae."

"Sahyung, Mount Hua is a martial arts sect. It is unacceptable that the sect is giving preference to a child simply because he brought money into the sect. How can the others all encourage it and forget the values of Mount Hua?"

Baek Cheon slammed the table. And spoke.

"Sajae, you should choose your words very carefully. What you said is an insult to the elders and sasuks."

"…that wasn't my intention."

"But you aren't necessarily wrong."

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"Yes?"

Baek Chen calmly nodded his head.

"You are right. Mount Hua does seem unfamiliar now. No matter how much money is made, we must focus on our martial arts in order to

truly restore the sect.”

“You’re right.”

“That’s true.”

Baek Cheon nodded at their responses.

“In the end, we have no choice but to get back to the basics. Now, the elders might be interested in him because of his contributions, but once they realize that the conference is approaching, there is no way that they’ll be able to pay attention to the third-class disciples.”

“Yes, sahyung. You’re right.”

“So, for now let’s focus on ourselves. We can fix that child’s attitude afterwards.”

Baek Sang glanced at Baek Cheon.

“But Sahyung.”

“What?”

“We aren’t going to be the only ones to participate in the conference. The third-class disciples will also be included in it.”

“Is there anyone here who doesn’t know that?”

“We can’t be the only ones working hard. Shouldn’t we also help prevent the third-class disciples from being humiliated?”

At that point, Baek Cheon looked with interest at Baek Sang.

“What do you think, Sajae?”

“If we’re only thinking about ourselves, then it would be fine for us to focus on our own training. However, as seniors to the third-class disciples, how can we forget to assist them? Even if it’s a bit troublesome, we should take care of our juniors. It might even help us out in the conference as well.”

Baek Cheon grinned.

“As expected, Sajae cares about everyone in Mount Hua more than anyone else.”

“I am embarrassed, Sahyung.”

“I think it’s a good idea. We must have gotten alienated from them since we were away for a year, so it wouldn’t be a bad idea to sweat together for a while.”

“Yes, Sahyung. That sounds like a good plan.”

Baek Cheon and Baek Sang smiled at each other.

In the end, dignity comes from strength. A gentle person is respected, but respect only goes so far.

Even in a family, authority is necessary. If left as it is, a day will come when the third-class disciples run amok without regard for their seniors.

Before that, they had to be put in place.

Teach them why the sasuks were adults and why the third-class disciples must bow their heads.

“I hope that child, Chung Myung, has a talent for martial arts. Then, wouldn’t Mount Hua have one more capable person to lead the future generation?”

“The person who will lead the future generation is you, Sahyung.”

“I cannot lead forever. It would be for the best if there was a smart child who followed my commands.”

Baek Cheon smiled.

“It looked like he couldn’t even walk properly, is there any hope for that child to have

talent in martial arts?”

Baek Mun said while shrugging his shoulders.

“Shouldn’t that be why we teach and lead the juniors? Though it might be a little daunting for Chung Myung.”

“I understand.”

The three of them smiled happily at one another.

‘I need to teach you to properly appreciate the dignity of your superiors.’

Baek Cheon’s cold eyes smirked as well.

“Are you sleeping?”

“*Uh*.”

“*Ugh*, I was dragged to Sasuk’s room because of you, and you’re lying down so comfortably?”

Yoon Jong’s face tensed up.

‘I shouldn’t bother… ’

He had no intention of asking Chung Myung to be polite to him; he threw away such notions on the evening that Chung Myung joined the sect.

Nevertheless, he felt emotional after seeing the Baek disciples treat Baek Cheon with such respect.

‘That’s how sects are supposed to be.’

Seeing how Baek Cheon was revered, Yoon Jong felt like crying.

‘There was a time when I was treated like that.’

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After a certain person arrived, everything changed. Bad habits are easy to learn but hard to correct…

“What are you thinking about, Sahyung?”

“…nothing.”

This one is the problem! This guy!

There was some respect shown for Yoon Jong in the past, but now Jo Gul treats him like some neighborhood brother!

Yoon Jong took a deep breath and looked at Jo Gul.

“Gul.”

“Yes.”

“Is it really a good thing that Chung Myung came to Mount Hua?”

“Don’t talk about strange things. Did something happen?”

‘Is that any way for a junior to speak to their senior?’

Ugh…

In the end, Yoon Jong decided to let go of everything and glanced at Chung Myung, who was lying on the bed, before opening his mouth.

“Senior asked me to tell him what he has been up to so far.”

“And so, did you decide to snitch?”

“…what’s the point of hiding it?”

“That’s true.”

They were going to find out eventually anyway.

“And the reaction?”

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“Are you asking because you really don’t know?”

“…I guess it’s obvious.”

Yoon Jong and Jo Gul sighed. Seeing Chung Myung still lying on the bed tapping his stomach, they couldn’t help it.

‘Crazy bastard.’

‘Good for nothing bastard.’

Anyway, Baek Cheon wasn’t their sahyung; he was their sasuk. How could Chung Myung even think about provoking someone so senior

to them on their first meeting?

Baek Cheon wasn't strict with the third-class disciples. However, if the relationship goes sour, there is no way to know what the future will hold.

"Well, it won't be good."

No one in the world can crush Chung Myung. Didn't Yoon Jong and Jo Gul also get defeated by him?

Fortunately, they were able to make the most of their situation. However, if Baek Cheon tries his luck and decides to trample on Chung Myung, then the situation could erupt into an even bigger mess.

"Well, arrows are going to fall on us."

"I know."

Once again, Yoon Jong sighed and looked at Jo Gul.

"We should have assumed this would happen when we learned that the sasuks were returning."

"Right."

"Call the others and tell them to be careful of their behavior from tomorrow on. Even if it's nothing special, if they find something to nitpick, I'm sure they won't let us off

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easily."

"Yes, I get it."

Jo Gul readied himself to leave with that response, but then he stopped and glanced at Yoon Jong.

“But Sahyung.”

“Yes?”

“I am curious about something…”

“About what?”

“If Baek Cheon sasuk and Chung Myung fought, who would win?”

“…don’t think about such ridiculous things and do what you are told.”

“*Tch*.”

Jo Gul clicked his tongue and went out.

Left in Chung Myung’s room, Yoon Jong glanced at the owner of the room, who was still dreaming soundly.

‘Who would win?’

Was he asking because he really didn’t know?

“…sleep well. Troublemaker.”

Now, the peace in Mount Hua was finally shattered. In the future, there will be a lot of commotion.

Chung Myung continued to sleep peacefully; his face seemed absent of any care or concerns in the world. Looking down at him, Yoon Jong sighed before walking out of the room with a subtle smile.

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“Listen.”

“Yes. Sect leader.”

Un Geom reached out and took a teacup.

Plum tea, made by drying plum petals, is one of the things that Hyun Jong is most proud of. Bringing that tea out meant there was quite a lot to talk about today.

“How is it?”

Before Un Geom answered, he glanced at Un Am. He was checking whether it was fine to speak in the presence of others. Hyun Jong, who took the tea, recognized this and said.

“It is fine.”

“Yes, then.”

Un Geom opened his mouth.

“As the sect leader said, I didn’t intervene. And…”

“And?”

“There seems to be a bit of a problem.”

“Hmm.”

Hyun Jong nodded at it.

“The atmosphere would have turned sour if Hyun Young sasuk hadn’t arrived when he did. As the sect leader said, there are subtle

sparks flowing between the second

and third-class disciples.”

“I see.”

Hyun Jong sighed.

This happened because of their decision.

‘I was in a hurry.’

The difference between the Un disciples and the Baek disciples was too great, and the difference between the Baek and the Chung disciples was too close. As a result, the youngest of the Baek disciples, Yu Yiseol, was almost the same age as Yoon Jong, the oldest of the Chung disciples.

Given that it was customary to have a few years difference between any group of disciples, it was apparent that this problem would explode at some point.

‘It was inevitable.’

When they received the third-class disciples, Mount Hua couldn’t actually afford to accept any new disciples. At that time, the sect’s finances were dwindling to a dangerous low. It had grown so severe that new students were barred from joining.

Then, someone suggested the idea of getting support from the disciples’ families in return for allowing their children to join the sect. That was the beginning of the problem.

With Mount Hua desperately struggling to hold together their crumbling foundations, it was necessary to gather funds by any means available to them.

However, even if they had fallen from grace, Mount Hua was still a prestigious sect.

They tried to be selective of who they accepted, but for the sake of the disciples who would grow up within the sect, they took the disciples of families who offered support without question.

As a result, Chung disciples are somewhat lacking in martial arts talent.

“In the past, the Chung disciples wouldn’t have dared to act against the Baek disciples. But aren’t the Chung disciples now different from what they were?”

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“Yes.”

Did they have a central figure? Didn’t that figure change?

A seemingly meaningless change began to ripple out and influence much more than expected. A single individual’s existence was affecting not only their group but also the relations between other groups.

With Yoon Jong and Jo Gul as the center of the Chung disciples, they barely passed as third-class disciples of Mount Hua. However, now the third-class disciples were gathered around Chung Myung, who isn’t satisfied with merely passing but wants excellent results.

People who are twenty years apart don’t see each other as competition, but those who are ten years apart, or even less, have no choice but to be conscious of each other.

“It’s my fault.”

As Un Geom bowed his head, Hyun Jong firmly shook his head.

“It isn’t your fault.”

“Sect leader…”

“I was the one who insisted that you be the head of the White Plum Blossom Boarding Hall. Didn’t everyone agree at the time? In the first place, this is something we all predicted when we started receiving the third-class disciples ahead of schedule.”

These words weren’t just meant to comfort Un Geom.

Mount Hua benefited a lot after creating the White Plum Blossom Dorms. But where there is something to gain, there is something to lose.

In the past, no junior would dare to skip the formalities with their seniors, regardless of the age difference.

However, the third-class disciples never received anything from the second-class disciples. They were taught by Un Geom and trained together with their comrades.

Naturally, the distance between the two groups was bound to widen.

That was the biggest weakness of the White Plum Blossom Boarding Hall.

Un Geom glanced at Hyun Jong and asked.

“Sect leader. What do you believe we should do?”

Hyun Jong savored the plum tea without saying a word. It felt calming to him, smelling the subtle scent wafting through the air.

“What can we do?”

“But leaving it like this…”

“People are always like that. Would their hearts be satisfied if we intervene and forcefully lead the situation? Sometimes, it isn’t wrong to let the disciples clash with each other and learn from their disagreements.”

“Sect leader, this is about our disciples.”

“If you put your mind to it, you could even change the direction of a river. But if you force the stream to turn, even if it seems plausible at first, there will be problems that arise farther down the flow.”

Hyun Jong said with a smile.

“Un Geom.”

“Yes, Sect Leader.”

“Let’s trust our children.”

“…”

Un Geom looked at Hyun Jong with a complicated expression. The expression said he had doubts about this.

At that time, Hyun Jong spoke about a different topic than Un Geom expected.

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“Baek Cheon isn’t that kind of problem child.”

“*Huh?* ”

“Don’t you think so too?”

Un Geom’s face went stiff.

‘No, it isn’t him, sect leader!’

Baek Cheon isn’t the problem. Sect leader! The problem is Chung Myung!

Only then did Un Geom realize that there was a huge gap in the way that the other elders saw Chung Myung compared to him.

The head of the White Plum Blossom dorms, Un Geom, saw Chung Myung up close as he controlled the third-class disciples. However, Hyun Jong and other elders only saw him as an adorable little puppy that brought blessings to Mount Hua!

“Isn’t Baek Cheon a careful and upright child? Even if his pride gets damaged and he loses himself to a moment of anger, he isn’t the sort of person to harm a child because of it.”

Pardon?

Who will hurt whom?

Baek Cheon will hurt Chung Myung?

‘This is crazy.’

Somehow, the sect leader was too naï ve!

However, explaining it seemed impossible. No, even if he could explain, the sect leader wouldn't believe it.

In fact, Un Geom doesn't fully understand Chung Myung himself. The way that the sect leader saw Chung Myung was miles apart from how Un Geom viewed him; how could he possibly convince Hyun Jong?

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"…yes, I understand. Sect leader."

In the end, Un Geom had no choice but to silently leave.

"Un Geom."

"Yes, Sect Leader."

"There isn't much time left before the conference."

As soon as the word 'conference' came out, Un Geom's face darkened.

To be honest, the disciples of Mount Hua didn't have any negative feelings towards the Southern Edge Sect in the past. In the first place, Mount Hua's feelings for the Southern Edge sect had stemmed from a competitive spirit.

But isn't competition inherently between people who are similar and not too different? The gap between Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect was like Heaven and Earth. No one had the burning spirit necessary to take down the Southern Edge Sect.

But, even if there was no motivation in this competition, who would want to see their disciples get beat up by the other side?

For the youngest children, the difference between them isn't too great, and the loss is not too humiliating. However, the difference more than doubles when the older disciples take center stage, and it only grows farther when those who trained directly under an elder appear.

"We've solved many problems. But the most important problem hasn't been solved yet. We are only at the beginning, and we need to recreate the splendid glory of Mount Hua."

"I'll keep that in mind, Sect Leader."

"Right. Both of you can leave."

"Yes."

"Yes."

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As Un Geom and Un Am left, Hyun Jong got up from his seat and opened the window at the back of his room, so he could see the peaks with melted snow.

There were small flower buds on the plum tree that had grown fast. By the time the conference begins, spring plum blossoms would likely bloom all over the mountain.

'Plum Blossom… Plum Blossoms.'

The Seven Sages Sword is back.

However, Hyun Jong was keenly aware of the fact that it was impossible to reproduce their past glory with just one sword art.

'Perhaps if we still had the Plum Blossom Sword technique.'

Hyun Jong tightly shut his eyes.

He knew that dwelling on what was lost in the past wouldn't bring about a change.

This wasn't the time to search for what they lacked; it was time to reinforce what they had.

Even so, regret lingered in the corner of his heart.

"Oh ancestors. Look down on Mount Hua."

Hyun Jong was still unaware that an ancestor had already descended on Mount Hua.

Unfortunately, Hyun Jong made two mistakes.

One was that he thought Chung Myung was a good child.

But from Mount Hua's point of view, it wasn't a large issue. Chung Myung's ultimate goal was to help grow Mount Hua. The more Hyun Jong favored Chung Myung, the wider his activities could be.

It wasn't intentional, but thanks to Hyun Jong giving preferential treatment to Chung Myung, Mount Hua was developing faster.

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But the other mistake was more fatal…

Baek Cheon was not as mild-mannered or gentle as Hyun Jong thought.

"Anything…"

"…"

“…Need food.”

“…”

The third-class disciples huddled together in their boarding hall had shocking faces.

Chung Myung’s practice left the disciples completely drained. He could somehow gauge the strength remaining in each and every disciple and would cruelly use that information to push them to their absolute limits, squeezing out every last drop of sweat from their bodies.

Therefore, after everyone was done training, they would come back with stiff faces and sunken cheeks.

Surprisingly, however, no third-class disciples expressed dissatisfaction from the harsh training.

Of course, they felt like they would die each time they practiced under him, but weren’t humans known to be adaptable?

After this terrible training was repeated for over a week, it somehow became more bearable. They’ve developed so much that even when they stumble into the underworld and lock eyes with that villainous Death, they turn their backs on the Grim Reaper and return on their own.

- The more that iron is beaten, the stronger it becomes, and the more a man gets beaten, the stronger he returns! Moss doesn’t gather on a man that’s been beaten.

‘Moss doesn’t normally grow on people anyway! You madman!’

Even worse was that the third-class disciples could see that Chung Myung was right.

They could feel their bodies changing day by day.

Now they understood what it meant to have a ‘fit body.’

But

The problem was that a new calamity struck the third-class disciples, who believed that they could overcome anything if they just followed Chung Myung’s training routine.

“…I think I’m going to die.”

“*Uh*… the sasuks are seriously…”

“Isn’t it getting worse each time?”

The Baek disciples were tormenting them.

That day,

After Chung Myung and Baek Cheon confronted each other, they began skillfully bullying the third-class disciples. It was clear that they were deliberately harassing them on each occasion.

“Why are they doing that?”

“Do you even need to ask?”

“*Ugh*.”

All eyes turned to the same location, and the one at the end of the gaze was,

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung, who received their gazes, just tilted his head.

“Why are you looking at me?”

“…”

“…”

This bastard was definitely born without a conscience.

“They told me that when I walk on the mountain, I need to keep my knees straight.”

“I was told that if I wanted to get some water to drink, I needed to ask them for permission first.”

“Ah fuck. They’re acting so cheap and dirty.”

The second-class disciples tormented the third-class disciples in any way they could imagine.

Every time they trained, they would nitpick the tiniest details and make all sorts of new rules to torment them.

Today, even though their boarding house was clean, the second-class disciples demanded they clean it until not a speck of dust could

be found.

“I’d rather take a beating.”

Jo Gul grunted.

He was someone accustomed to bullying others with his fists, so he couldn’t get used to this kind of abuse.

“I never imagined that the second-class disciples were such people.”

“I respected them!”

“We aren’t in some neighborhood brawl, are their actions even acceptable?”

Yoon Jong sighed.

‘There’s nothing that says they can’t do this.’

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There was no doubt that the second-class disciples were harassing them. The malice and ridicule being directed at the third-class disciple were evident.

Despite that, their actions couldn’t be criticized. In the first place, everything that the second-class disciples demanded of the third-class disciples was rules and norms set forth by Mount Hua.

Then what was the problem?

‘Because such rules were established at least two hundred years ago.’

Inherently, old rules are modified and changed according to the current times.

But Mount Hua never did that.

Therefore, it was decided that the sect would pick and choose which rules to follow according to the times while ignoring the ones that were out of date.

However, the second-class disciples used such archaic rules to attack and control the third-class disciples.

Leaving everything else aside, the biggest problem was that there were common rules which gave the older ones the power to rule.

“No, they said Mount Hua’s disciples should never let go of their sword. Do they want us to hold our swords even when we’re bathing or doing laundry? What about when we use the bathroom!?”

“…I was told to hold it in hand even when I eat.”

“And hold it while sleeping!”

“What nonsense is that? Are we supposed to memorize every rule our ancestors came up with throughout all of Mount Hua’s history!?”

“…they don’t even know all of them.”

“That’s what I am saying!”

The third-class disciples gnashed their teeth.

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It felt as if their nerves were going to split in anger because of this absurd abuse of power like their lives were shortening each time the

second-class disciples approached them.

“I can’t even eat or sleep properly!”

“They gather us just because they’re bored, and they blame everyone and swear at us even if only one person made a mistake.”

“What the hell are they trying to achieve?”

“Ugh! Can’t we do something about this?”

Yoon Jong sighed.

“What can we do?”

“Isn’t this a bit harsh? To be honest, they aren’t even hiding that they’re bullying us, they are clearly crossing the line.”

“Right! I can tolerate anything else, but I can’t stand them disturbing our training time! Anyway, this is a martial sect, how can they dare to interfere with our practice!?”

The third-class disciples had bloodshot eyes.

Actually, until now, the second and third-class disciples had no reason to fight. The second-class disciples were too busy with their own training, and the third-class disciples would learn from Un Geom in the White Plum Blossom dorms. They had very little interaction with each other.

Still, before all of this happened. The third-class disciples felt a sense of admiration and longing towards the second-class disciples. But now that the seniors turned against their juniors like this, they were feeling an indescribable sense of betrayal.

Yoon Jong turned his head to the culprit behind this.

He looked at Chung Myung, who was leaning on a chair and said

“Chung Myung.”

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“Huh?”

“…shouldn’t we do something?”

“About?”

“Sasuk, sasuks!”

Yoon Jong deeply sighed.

Everyone was yelling and cursing until now, but Chung Myung didn’t register a word of what was happening?

Right now, the second-class disciples wanted the third-class disciples to bow before them, especially Chung Myung.

‘Despite this being a boring way to get that done.’

But Yoon Jong could understand the second-class disciples in his own way.

In fact, it wasn’t the second-class disciples that were wrong for feeling disrespected by Chung Myung, but the path they chose to get them to submit was wrong. To be precise, the path wasn’t entirely wrong, but the way they were acting was.

Even if Yoon Jong was a second-class disciple, he would have a hard time tolerating a person like Chung Myung.

So far, there have been no problems with elders and the first-class disciples1. This was because Chung Myung never crossed the line when dealing with them. It was unknown what was going on in

Chung Myung's mind, but he would always show respect to the adults within the sect.

But the Baek disciples were different.

Didn't Yoon Jong already see for himself how Chung Myung spoke with the Baek disciples?

"…isn't it obvious what they want?"

"Obvious?"

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Yoon Jong sighed.

"I won't tell you to change your personality or bow to them. Just try backing down and comply for a bit…"

"Comply?"

Yoon Jong's eyes trembled at the way Chung Myung said it.

Shit, he chose the wrong word…

However, contrary to Yoon Jong's expectations, Chung Myung didn't throw a fit.

Rather, he looked at Yoon Jong with bright eyes and spoke with creepy cheerfulness.

"Sahyung, Sahyung!"

"Huh!?"

“I think I know of a better way to solve this! With this method, I can really solve everything!”

Seeing Chung Myung’s face bright with excitement, Yoon Jong felt anxiousness sink into him, but he couldn’t avoid asking.

“…what method is that?”

“Do you need to ask? I am going to destroy those sasuk bastards!”

As soon as Chung Myung answered, he got up from his seat, and Yoon Jong desperately yelled.

“Catch him! Catch that madman! If we don’t catch him, we all die! Get him!”

Perhaps the others felt the same anxiousness, but all the Sahyungs ran and prepared to catch him at once. While they all held onto Chung Myung’s limbs and pulled him back, Jo Gul jumped up and crushed Chung Myung’s body to the floor.

“Ahhhh!”

“Don’t let him go! Never let go!”

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“Let go! Aren’t you going to let go!”

The third-class disciples clung to him like dogs holding onto food. In their desperate eyes, there was only one thing going on ‘Don’t let this mad dog loose outside of the boarding house!’

“Chung Myung! Calm down! Chung Myung!”

“I will smash them all!”

“There are rules to seniority in the sect! if you ignore that, you will be excommunicated if you beat the seniors!”

Chung Myung’s eyes lit up.

“Fine! I won’t smash them completely! I won’t! I will just hit one person! Just one I am telling you!”

“That’s still fighting someone from a level higher than us, you idiot! Ugh! Just hold him tight!”

“Ah, how can this bastard be this strong!?”

“Ughhh!”

Chung Myung grunted through his teeth.

“Those bastards are doing things that we didn’t even do a hundred years ago! I’ll just teach them a short lesson!”

A Taoist home needs to be pure and natural. In other words, it is a place unbound from norms and classes created by society.

Wasn’t there a famous story of how Confucius came to greet Lao-tzu and he said to not do such things?

However, the disciples of such a sect were doing such things?

“Calm down, Chung Myung! We will be in huge trouble if you beat the sasuks!”

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“All the things you did till now won’t matter anymore!”

“Stay still will you!”

“Let go! Let go of me!”

The third-class disciples all built a giant human tower and pressed Chung Myung to the ground. Yet each time he wriggled, the massive tower reeled.

Seeing that, Yoon Jong broke out in a cold sweat.

‘No, does this even make any sense?’

Baek Cheon is the strongest of the second-class disciples.

Until Chung Myung arrived, Baek Cheon naturally stood first among the disciples.

Everyone had no doubts that he would continue to be first for a long time and eventually become the greatest master within the sect.

Jo Gul wasn’t inferior to him, but learning martial arts like the second-class disciples would take time. It was virtually impossible for Jo Gul to catch up with Baek Cheon, who had already trained in martial arts for nearly a decade.

Even if it was possible, it would take decades for it to happen.

That was why the disciples were accepted with large age gaps. No matter how talented they were, it would take enough time to accumulate their skills. Therefore, the different disciples’ groups couldn’t overcome one another easily.

But what was happening in front of Yoon Jong now?

The youngest of the third-class disciples, who only recently entered Mount Hua, was talking about destroying all the second-class disciples.

‘The real problem is that no one here thinks it’s impossible.’

What if it was thought about rationally?

He couldn’t understand.

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No matter how strong Chung Myung was, it was unlikely that he could win against Baek Cheon. Even if Chung Myung had learned martial arts since birth, Baek Cheon would still have more years of training under his belt.

Moreover, Baek Cheon was not a man that lacked talent.

It would be impossible to overcome such a difference. A person who could do such a thing would be a genius. However, even if Chung Myung was a genius, he couldn’t overcome a ten-year age gap.

If Yoon Jong thought about it rationally, it was impossible for Chung Myung to defeat Baek Cheon.

‘But the problem is that it still feels like Baek Cheon sasuk will get beaten quite a lot.’

In the first place, common sense and rationality didn’t apply to Chung Myung. Has anything that this guy did till now made sense?

“Chung Myung.”

Yoon Jong sighed and said,

“I understand how you feel, but not now.”

“Why?”

“The conference is coming soon.”

“What about it?”

“…Baek Cheon sahyung is the person who will represent the second-class disciples.

What will happen if you beat him so badly that he can’t participate?”

“Come on. You don’t think I will beat him like that, do you? I just need to beat him so that it hurts without leaving any visible signs, that’s my specialty! Don’t you know?”

“I know.”

Yoon Jong knew very well because he had been hit like that countless times.

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“But you can’t do that. Baek Cheon Sahyung is our sasuk. Will he be able to perform properly after having his confidence shattered like that?”

“…”

“Let’s hold on a little longer. It’s better for us to be harassed by the Baek disciples than to be humiliated by the Southern Edge sect.”

Chung Myung frowned.

“I think it would be better to just hit him.”

“Just this once, I am asking you to let this go. Please. The conference is a huge deal for us. Please.”

“Hmm.”

Chung Myung turned his head and spoke in a dull voice.

“Move now.”

The sahyungs looked at Yoon Jong, and when he nodded, they very slowly let go of Chung Myung and moved to the side. Still, they stayed close enough to be able to catch him if he suddenly ran.

“Then we need to just wait until the conference is over, right?”

“…don’t have to wait till then, but…”

“What is with you!? Say it clearly!”

Yoon Jong tightly closed his eyes and spoke as if he was quelling a raging fire.

“Yes! Only till the conference!”

“Okay!”

Chung Myung nodded his head.

“This is something the great Sahyung requested, so I have to listen.”

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“…thank you, so much.”

“Why are you crying?”

“No. Nothing.”

‘These aren’t tears. It’s the sweat from my heart, you bastard!’

“But what should I do if they come to me for a fight?”

“…would that even happen?”

“Just, what if?”

Yoon Jong sighed.

“Then you can handle it however you want. I wouldn’t know what to do if that happened anyway.”

“Really?”

The corners of Chung Myung’s mouth curled into a devilish grin, and seeing that smile, Yoon Jong’s heart suddenly felt a hundred times more uncomfortable.

1. First-class disciples are given the name Un, e.g. Un Am and Un Geom are first-class disciples and one generation older than the Baek disciples.↩

Announcement: This chapter is marked as 82 as it's the correct number, we missed a chapter after Chapter 4, so the numbering from there on is wrong. We're correcting it now and uploading the missing chapter as Chapter 4.5 soon. Sorry for the inconvenience.

“How was it?”

“…surprisingly, there was no reaction.”

“Is that so?”

Baek Sang looked into Baek Cheon's eyes and answered.

"Yes. It didn't seem like they were angry enough to lash out; he hasn't even said anything that we could use to cause problems with them."

"*Hmm,* really?"

Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes.

'This is a little different from what I expected.'

Isn't he at a rebellious age? Baek Cheon thought that if he scratched the third-class disciples a little, they'd immediately revolt against them, and this was what he aimed for.

Mount Hua is a prestigious sect.

There are only two sins considered to be utterly taboo within the sect. One was to never touch the Demonic Arts, and the other was to usurp their seniors.

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These two actions are the most heavily punished crimes. The former is related to Mount Hua's identity as a righteous sect, while the latter is a matter of challenging the history, traditions, and system of Mount Hua.

So, Baek Cheon planned to anger the third-class disciples and then use the sect's rules to tie them down so that they couldn't resist them any further. Surprisingly, the third-class disciples were tolerating their abuse well.

"Should we apply more pressure?"

“It would be unreasonable to go beyond this. If we go any farther, we may be faulted for causing the dispute.”

“*Hmm*.”

Baek Cheon let out a low sigh as if he didn’t like it.

‘Then… is he not simply a hot-blooded idiot?’

Considering what he saw from Chung Myung at the dining hall, he seemed to be impatient and reckless. He was someone that didn’t care about his reputation and even controlled the third-class disciples…

‘Was this Yoon Jong’s doing?’

Whatever the case, it was certain that Baek Cheon’s plan was falling apart.

“What about the other third-class disciples?”

“There’s nothing. Aside from the fact that they’re doing some strange training…”

Baek Cheon gently tapped his cheek with his finger.

“I see.”

“Sahyung. It’s unreasonable to prolong this. We don’t know when the sasuks will grow displeased with our actions, and there isn’t much time left until the conference too.”

“I know.”

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Baek Cheon nodded his head.

“Now that it’s boiled, it’s time to scoop out the porridge.”

“Then?”

At Baek Sang’s question, Baek Cheon smiled and spoke.

“As you know, the Chung disciples are good children.”

“That’s true. Before we left, they were all so naive and innocent. Yet, they’ve changed that much in a single year…”

“It’s because they got entangled with a problematic child. In fact, do we really need to punish all the children? The problem is Chung Myung alone.”

“You’re right.”

Baek Sang agreed.

The third-class disciples and their representative, Yoon Jong, aren’t difficult children to deal with. Jo Gul was a bit wild, but he was a child who Baek Cheon could handle.

The problem is Chung Myung.

Don’t they say that people change according to their surroundings?

The third-class disciples were fine before but became strange due to Chung Myung’s influence.

At least the third-class disciples still showed respect to their superiors, and they knew that the words of their sasuks were more important than words from their peers.

It was none other than Chung Myung who corrupted them like this.

In other words, if Chung Myung could be broken, then the third-class disciples would naturally become as docile and obedient as they used to be.

“What do you plan to do?”

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“Sajae.”

“Yes, Sahyung.”

Baek Cheon smiled.

“Do we need another way? What we are doing now is just obeying and enforcing the rules of Mount Hua, isn’t that right?”

“That’s true, Sahyung.”

“There is no room for personal emotions to intervene. Isn’t Chung Myung also a precious junior of Mount Hua? He might be a bit cheeky, but if we can use him well, he’ll be a good resource. So, I am just going to correct the mistakes the young child is making.”

Baek Cheon smiled.

“However, the problem is the method. I didn’t want to use the rough method, if possible, but I don’t have enough time, so it is inevitable. The best way to discipline a child is through conversation, but occasionally isn’t it also necessary to reprimand them?”

Baek Sang nodded his head as if he was excited.

“One day, they will understand the meaning behind sahyungs actions.”

“Right. Even if it might hurt a little now.”

The two looked at each other and smiled.

Kiik!

The door to the White Plum Blossom boarding house opened.

Peek!

And then a little head popped out. The man who peeked around frowned slightly.

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‘Nobody’s here?’

Like a guest in the night seeping through the darkness, Chung Myung glanced around with a sense of urgency.

Nothing weird and no people around.

Chung Myung sighed and stepped outside.

“*Kuak!* ”

What was he doing?

Leaving the dorms, he looked up at the sky with a despondent face; it appeared as if his soul was escaping.

“My Sahyung. Are you watching?”

What his Sahyung loved most in the world was…

- What?

Ah, don't get annoyed already. Listen peacefully from the beginning and wait until I'm finished before getting angry! Be patient and listen! You were the sect leader of Mount Hua in the past!

Chung Myung's face twisted.

"Anyway, I am doing all this to avoid such an airheaded person. Does this make any sense?"

He spoke with a great deal of resentment, but unfortunately, there was no answer to be heard.

"And that's not all! There's that woman who never misses a chance to bother me.

Then there's that other guy who looks like a parasite feeding on others, always coming around speaking about ancient rules of the sect that I've never even heard of and targeting his junior disciples. *Ah!* I'd rather just die than to suffer these fools!"

Being patient wasn't in Chung Myung's nature. He really just wanted to flip

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everything upside down. These children were causing such a fuss he even felt like he wanted to go and make the sect leader spank some sense into these kids.

After what Chung Myung's been through, even if he ran straight to the Shaolin sect, they would willingly accept him as a disciple for his patience and diligence.

"*Haaa!* What sin did I commit to deserve thi—… I've committed many sins… in my previous life…"

To be honest, he couldn't do anything about it because of conscience. Considering how much his Sahyung, who was the sect leader, had struggled to help him when he was a second-class disciple of Mount Hua, he couldn't say anything to the children now or their elders.

"Why did I act like that?"

Chung Myung's eyes turned wet.

He should have acted in moderation.

It seemed like the karma from his previous life was tormenting him now. He felt horrible as he tried to lead the little ones to grow into full adulthood.

'Ah, I guess this must be why Sahyung didn't get married in his previous life. He was afraid that he would end up having a child like me.'

Sorry! Sahyung.

He always thought that his Sahyung lacked a pretty face, so he couldn't get married…

Taking a deep breath, Chung Myung walked out of the sect grounds. In the past, there would have been a guard at the main gate, but the current Mount Hua didn't have many visitors, so there was no need for guards.

And the reason was simple.

Not so long ago, Mount Hua was a place where even beggars wouldn't come, so there was no need to place guards.

It was Chung Myung who reinvigorated Mount Hua.

But these ungrateful bastards! They didn't even thank him for bringing enough money for the sect to survive so long that they wouldn't run dry even if everyone turned old!

He wanted to hit this guy and that guy, no, he wanted to beat everyone…

"*Ah*, it's impossible to do that either."

It was weird, but these days Yoon Jong's face seems to constantly overlap with his Sahyung's face. It would be disrespectful to compare Yoon Jong's fair and handsome face to his sahyung, who looked like a bandit. Their expressions were similar, though.

Seeing Yoon Jong with a sour expression that looked like he was helpless and nervous each time Chung Myung did something…

'Strangely, I feel guilty.'

It was hard to ignore because it felt like Sahyung was coming back to life and nagging at him.

"*Tch*."

Chung Myung shook his head again.

"I just need to endure it until the end of the conference."

Even Chung Myung wanted to teach the Southern Edge Sect bastards a lesson. No matter how annoyed he was with the Baek disciples, it could not compare to his hatred held towards the Southern Edge Sect.

He only wanted to kick the asses of the Baek disciples, but he wanted to completely strangle all life from the Southern Edge Sect.

As Yong Joon said, it was best to wait until the conference passed.

Right…

“Yeah. If I can’t control my temper, more problems will come up.”

Until the conference ends, it would be best to avoid running into the Baek disciples.

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Chung Myung started climbing the mountain peak through a different path than usual.

‘I won’t go to that peak anymore.’

A person can be beaten twice, but not three times. If you fall for the same trick three times, are you even human?

Chung Myung turned his head and looked at the peak he went to in the past.

“*Ah,* my God. Now I can’t even train where I want to.”

Even now, the other sects and their disciples who have trained diligently for a hundred years must be getting stronger.

To close the gap between them, Chung Myung doesn’t have time to spare resting.

There’s no point in being strong alone.

In order for Mount Hua to stand tall among the Ten Great Sects… no, to go beyond that, and to be able to reproduce their legend as the best swordsmen in the world, the existence of a warrior who can subdue the ancient masters overlooking the other sects is essential.

No matter how often he thought about it, in the current Mount Hua, Chung Myung was the only one who could play that role.

Well, one could never know.

Fifty years? One hundred years?

If his goal was the sect's longevity, he might try helping Jo Gul or Yoon Jong. Although he was acting petty, Baek Cheon was also talented. It seems like they could have potential as long as the foundation is established correctly.

The problem was that Chung Myung wasn't the sort of person who could patiently wait around.

"I'll freeze to death if I need to wait for fifty years."

Before that happens, he'll die.

Chung Myung, who climbed to a new mountain peak, slowly drew his sword and glanced around.

'No one's here, right?'

Whether it was an accident or intentional, that woman has been following Chung Myung like a leech since that day.

Although she was more well-behaved compared to the other Baek disciples, she would constantly pop up and annoy him when he was alone.

That was enough for Chung Mung to try and avoid her, but strangely, even with Chung Myung's powerful senses, he still struggled to detect her presence until it was too late to avoid her.

‘It’s not like she’s a ghost, so why… ’

There are plenty of people who have a weak or vague presence, but Yu Yiseol was especially unique even among such people.

Moreover, Chung Myung is used to feeling the presence of people by their qi rather than with his eyes or ears, especially…

“Chung Myung.”

“*Accck!* ”

And like this.

Chung Myung jumped up and stepped back in a panic. In his eyes, he looked at Yu Yiseol, whose hand stretched out towards him.

“*Ah!* Come on! Show up with a bit of a flair at least! Announce yourself first!”

When Chung Mung screamed, Yu Yiseol frowned.

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“You should call me Sago1, I am your Sago”

“So what?”

“You need to respect your seniors.”

‘Forget that. You are more like a ghost!’

Chung Myung sighed in frustration.

It was ridiculous that she had such a faint and hazy presence. Certainly, the world is a large place, it's not strange that such a unique constitution exists, but her mind was also weird.

In fact, Chung Myung highly specialized in detecting the presence of others with his qi. If you simply used your five senses instead, then it wasn't impossible to keep track of her.

The real problem was something else.

"Just why are you following me like this!?"

"Is that how you should ask?"

"…senior."

Chung Myung felt a deep sadness in his chest.

'If the Sahyungs saw me now, they'd fall over gasping for air at the hilarity of this situation… no, they might even cry while laughing.'

Maybe they'd even clap their hands until they break. That was how great this sight was.

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Chung Myung had to respectfully address a girl who is even younger than the granddaughters of his peers. He felt as though he had attained enlightenment, as he saw the world openly mocking him and showing him the futility of his actions.

Would the world be fine if he decided to stray from the path and abandon these rules?

-No, it wouldn’t, you bastard!

Ah, seriously, come on!

Chung Myung took a deep breath and looked at Yu Yiseol.

“So, why? Why do you keep following me!?”

“*Hmm?* ”

“…senior.”

Yu Yiseol raised her eyebrow in discontent.

Honestly, it looked like she was trying to slightly intimidate him, but it looked cute on her.

‘She isn’t cute just because I’m old.’

As Jo Gul and the rest of the third-class disciples said before, she was a beauty. If she had a more colorful expression and didn’t give such a cold impression, then she would attract several times more attention than she does now.

What an unfair world for people to care so much about appearances. Well, Chung Myung was also famous for his great looks in the past…

Ah, fine! Fine!

“That sword.”

Yu Yiseol said while looking at Chung Myung.

“The sword which creates Plum Blossoms.”

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“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Chung Myung acted dumb.

It wasn’t something that could be understood if explained, and he didn’t have a reason to speak either. It was annoying how she’d constantly pester and follow him, so it was better to simply escape.

“I don’t know what I did, and I don’t know what you are talking about so don’t waste your ti—”

“Teach me.”

“—me and go…?”

Chung Myung was shocked.

“What was that?”

“Teach me.”

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

‘Is this the reason she followed me?’

He thought that she would create trouble by telling others that he secretly learned some sword techniques outside of Mount Hua or blackmail him, but he didn’t expect such words to emerge.

Now he was curious.

“You know what it—… no. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Yu Yiseol slightly bit her lip.

“I’ll tell the sasuks.”

“Go ahead. It’ll be good if they believe you.”

“I’ll tell the sect leader too.”

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“Sure, sure. Do whatever you want.”

Chung Myung clenched his nose with one hand and waved with the other.

‘Let’s see if they believe you or not.’

Who would believe that Chung Myung, who entered Mount Hua less than a year ago, could perform the Plum Blossom Sword?

What would the sect leader say?

‘ *Haha*. It seems like our Yu Yiseol has had a difficult time during her closed room training. I’ll find a good physician for you.’

That would probably be what he says; she would be lucky if they didn’t toss her out of the room.

“Teach me, and I won’t tell anyone.”

“I’m telling you. I don’t care who you tell.”

Chung Myung smiled.

“So, don’t interfere with other people’s training and go away. Because of you, I can never get any practice done.”

Go away, okay?

Just go! You are like a leech!

Chung Myung, who was about to retort again, went dumb at Yu Yiseol, who stared and said.

“You aren’t going to teach me?”

“Excuse me. Sago (female senior of a higher level).”

“*Huh?* ”

“You are the sago, and I am the sajae. What could I even teach a Sago? Rather, I

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should be learning from you.”

“…”

Yu Yiseol flinched at Chung Myung’s words.

‘Oh, that seemed to work.’

Since she kept emphasizing her seniority from the moment they met until now, this might work…

“There are no hierarchies when it comes to learning.”

“…”

No, where the hell did she learn to think like this? Did the Baek disciples have some Confucian teachings within them? How dare Confucianism enter into our precious sect!

“So, teach me.”

“No, because I have nothing to teach you!”

Chung Myung bluntly cut her off.

“I don’t know what Sago could have seen, but it must have been a dream. Or maybe it was a fantasy? Otherwise, you must have been overworked and hallucinated. I have no idea what Sago is even talking about! So stop with this and leave me alone.”

Chung Myung cut off her words which made her narrow her eyes.

“I couldn’t have been wrong.”

“No, that is just nonsen—”

“Because I have seen it before.”

“Before…”

Chung Myung’s eyes lit up.

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“What?”

The atmosphere around Chung Myung changed as he glared at Yu Yiseol with sharp eyes.

A sword that makes plum blossoms bloom.

The Plum Blossom Sword technique.

There are numerous sword arts in Mount Hua which were modeled after plum blossoms.

However, this technique does not merely mimic the shape of plum blossoms; there were only a few techniques that could truly make plum blossoms bloom.

And there was no way that it could be passed on to normal disciples. At the very least, one had to be an elder, and it was only transferred from a master to his disciple when the master felt that their disciple was worthy.

However, on that fateful day in the past, all the elders of Mount Hua died. Nobody could have predicted that they would be annihilated, so none of the elders had passed their techniques onto their disciples.

That is to say.

If someone could make plum blossoms, it must mean that they learned the Twenty-Four Plum Blossom Sword technique.

And the only place where the sword technique was currently being taught…

“What is your relationship with the Southern Edge Sect?”

As Chung Myung spoke in a sneer, Yu Yiseol tilted her head.

“Southern Edge?”

“…”

“Why Southern Edge?”

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Is she not related to them?

Chung Myung stared at her face. No matter how he looked for signs of deceit, he could only see confusion in its place. If she was just acting, then she would do better by giving up the sword and becoming an actor in a drama group. She could even perform in front of the emperor.

However, Chung Myung didn’t think that Yu Yiseol had the brain to control her expression so perfectly.

Chung Myung was losing it.

‘But.’

Even if she was a spy of the Southern Edge Sect, there was no way that she could have seen anyone perform the Plum Blossom Sword technique. The Plum Blossom Sword technique has a deeper meaning only when combined with Mount Hua’s cultivation method.

…they couldn’t have stolen that too, right?

No!

Chung Myung, who returned to his casual smile, shrugged his shoulders and asked.

“You saw it before, what do you mean?”

Now Yu Yiseol’s face darkened.

“A very long time ago.”

Yu Yiseol looked up at the dark sky as if recalling old memories and spoke again with a stern face.

“Teach me.”

“I’m telling you that I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Is that so?”

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Yu Yiseol nodded her head.

‘Has she finally given up?’

Thank Go—

“Then there is nothing I can do.”

Srrng!

Yu Yiseol unsheathed the sword from her waist as Chung Myung looked back in horror.

“Ah! W-What is up with you so suddenly!?”

“You’re not going to teach me, right?”

‘What’s wrong with this crazy bitch!?’

Who draws their sword just because somebody won’t teach them swordsmanship?

What the hell were these Baek disciples being taught?

“You’re drawing your sword just because I won’t teach you?”

“It’s because you are right.”

“What?”

“I am the senior, and you’re the junior.”

“…”

“So, I need to educate you properly.”

Yu Yiseol raised her sword and aimed it at Chung Myung. Seeing that, he smiled.

‘No wonder the Baek disciples aren’t close to her.’

Of course, they weren’t. Because she was absolutely insane!

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‘Isn’t her obsession with the Plum Blossom Sword technique weird too?’

“I’m coming!”

“What coming!? Don’t come!”

But there was no way this mad woman would listen to Chung Myung. Yu Yiseol quickly ran towards Chung Myung with her sword pointed straight.

“*Ah!* ”

Chung Myung quickly retreated with the wooden sword in his hand as the sword of Yu Yiseol arrived before him.

“No! what kind of Sago would attack their Sajae with a real sword!”

“Because you are stronger than me.”

Huh? That is true, isn’t it?

No, but what makes her believe that?

She couldn’t possibly have known that. How strange. She clearly had the wrong impression, but Chung Myung couldn’t even correct her because she ended up with the correct answer.

Phat! Phat!

Just like Chung Myung had seen before, Yu Yiseol's sword was light and had a brilliant elegance to it.

It pierces sharply and bends gently. The sword shakes like an illusion before lightly stabbing in again.

Mount Hua's Sword.

Since returning to Mount Hua, Chung Myung had seen many swords. He had seen the Baek disciples', Un Geom's, and sometimes he had the opportunity to see the elders'

swords as well.

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However, the sword unfolding before him now was closer to the true source of Mount Hua than any of the others he'd seen.

Just seeing this swordsmanship made him feel strangely sentimental.

Why?

'Because her movement resembles the past Mount Hua? If not—'

"Move!"

At that moment, Yu Yiseol's sword came to pierce Chung Myung at the speed of light.

Chung Myung turned his head and narrowly avoided it.

Swosh!

Several strands of his hair lightly drifted to the ground.

“*EEEikkk!* ”

Was this crazy bitch really going to stab him?

“Have you gone insane!? If I didn’t avoid that, I would have died!”

“There’s no way that you wouldn’t have avoided it.”

“Why are you so confident in me!?”

What is wrong with her head? Why doesn’t she think like normal people?

No wonder she has such a pretty face but no friends!

But there was no time for conversation.

Yu Yiseol’s sword began to sharpen as she closed in on Chung Myung. Still, it would be easy enough for him to deal with it.

Ugh… if he could attack, that is.

If Chung Myung turned Yu Yiseol’s attack against herself, then she would go from

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being confident in his skills to a hardcore fan of his. He needed to find some way to subdue her without getting hurt and without showing his ability.

Swish!

“I said don’t do that, woman!”

“It’s Sago!”

“What kind of Sago tries to kill her junior! Just what is wrong with your brain?”

‘Oh my! My ancestors. This is how far our Mount Hua has fallen!’

Chung Myung, who was lamenting his fate, frowned for a moment.

Perhaps it was because he was able to leisurely observe the incoming attacks despite their conversation, but he could see Yu Yiseol’s movements slowly changing. As if her eyes were drunk and losing focus, her sword began to deviate from the set path.

‘ *Oh?* ’

Enlightenment in the middle of a spar?

‘Even Jo Gul couldn’t achieve that.’

Jo Gul could be considered the best in Mount Hua in terms of swordsmanship talent.

‘No.’

Chung Myung stretched out his wooden sword and helped the deviating sword return to the proper path.

Achieving enlightenment meant entering a trance-like state and finding their one true sword. If you intervened without the confidence or ability to handle it, then it was possible that the enlightened state could be shattered immediately; in the worst case, they may even receive a backlash and die.

Ordinary people would have rushed to retreat without daring to get involved.

But Chung Myung could anticipate and understand the sword’s path at each moment

and lead the sword in the best direction.

‘Not there. Right, this side. No no, I said here.’

Tuk! Tuk!

Chung Myung would stretch out his sword and tap Yu Yiseol’s sword, leading it to the correct path. The only thing that could be done in such a situation was to let it flow…

“What are you doing!? You bastard!”

Chung Myung turned his head to see who suddenly intervened.

Baek Cheon, who seemed to have lost his mind in anger, rushed to him at a frantic speed.

Ah… why the hell are you here!? You damn brat!

1. Sago is a female senior of higher tier, feminine equivalent to Sasuk.↩

“You bastard! What are you doing!?”

Seeing Baek Cheon running at an insane speed, Chung Myung looked up at the sky with a soulless face.

Haa.

Oh dear, my poor fate.

Baek Cheon lunged at Chung Myung and swung his sword without hesitation.

Wait, why did he also have a real sword?

‘What is with these disciples constantly taking out real swords? Who will take responsibility if they unsheathe their sword and something crazy happens?’

While Chung Myung was lost in thought, Baek Cheon’s sword threateningly sped towards him. A deep blue and black qi formed around it, aiming for Chung Myung’s shoulder.

Baek Cheon did well to aim at a non-vital area despite his hysteria.

But,

“The after-effects of that sword qi will kill me anyway, you crazy bastard!”

Chung Myung kicked the flying sword with his foot.

Kang!

A loud sound rang throughout the area as the sword, layered in qi, and the foot collided with one another. Unable to withstand the impact, Baek Cheon was thrown back.

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“*Uh?* ”

Baek Cheon swiftly rose to his feet, alternating between Chung Myung and his sword.

His eyes shook in bewilderment. Everything happened so quickly for him that he didn't understand what had happened.

"*Tch.* "

Chung Myung clicked his tongue and examined Yu Yiseol's condition. Such a huge sound broke out next to her while she was in a trance, so her enlightenment…

"She's fine?"

Normally, this much commotion would rouse a person from their enlightenment, but Yu Yiseol was still entranced.

Slow.

She's too slow.

But she was benefiting from her dull wittedness. It wasn't common for a person to fall into a trance while swinging their sword.

In Buddhism, it was referred to as 'exaltation' in the sense that one forgets themselves. Casting off their shell and entering a new realm. For warriors, this was the absolute most crucial moment.

If she had been woken out of it, she would have regretted it all her life.

"Bastard! What are you doing!? Don't you know how important enlightenment is for a warrior?"

'And you attacked me despite knowing that?'

Chung Myung gazed at Baek Cheon with wide eyes.

“Touching someone in a trance! No matter how little common sense you have, there are some things you can’t do! You ruthless brat!”

Baek Cheon stared at Chung Myung.

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“It’s true that I didn’t like you, but I had no idea that you were such a rotten bastard you’d even mess with someone in a trance! I should correct that habit of yours right now!”

Chung Myung took a deep breath.

‘No, you idiot. I didn’t mess with her, I helped guide her.’

‘Haha, but how would you know that? It’s my fault. I’m the sinner here.’

“If you knew how important a trance was, then why did you draw your sword and attack?”

“What?”

“What if your sword had gone towards Sago and hurt her?”

“If you hadn’t counterattac—!”

“Then I should just die?”

“…”

Chung Myung responded to Baek Cheon, who seemed flustered.

‘Are all the Baek disciples crazy?’

The world is usually dominated by ordinary people with a few madmen mixed in.

However, it seemed like the Baek disciples took that rule in reverse and flooded themselves with insane kids.

Out of all the Baek disciples Chung Myung talked to, there wasn't a single normal person yet.

If Yoon Jong had heard, he would have said that one dog was barking at another, but he wasn't here to complain.

"Are you saying that I was trying to kill you?"

"It didn't look like you wanted me alive."

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"…it was an urgent situation."

"And you even drew a sword."

"…t-that."

Baek Cheon's face, which heard Chung Myung's argument, flinched.

Wait a moment.

As Chung Myung said, Baek Cheon utilized sword qi on a real sword. So, how was he able to escape without a single wound?

Does that mean this kid could casually handle Baek Cheon's attack?

"Get away from Samae!"

Baek Cheon's face hardened as he spoke in a determined voice.

“I won’t ask what you were doing. But put your sword down and step away from her.

Otherwise, you will have to deal with me as a warrior and not your sasuk.”

Oh, doesn’t that sound good?

Chung Myung was delighted.

“Really?”

“…”

Great, this was what Chung Myung was hoping for.

“You bastard, until the end…”

Baek Cheon gnashed his teeth.

Humans were the sort that needed to adjust their thinking based on their individual situations.

If your perspective changed, then Baek Cheon’s anger was reasonable. From his

point of view, an irredeemable taboo had been transgressed by his junior.

Normally, it was right to put a stop to those actions.

The problem was…

Chung Myung licked his lips and turned his head.

‘If I help a little more, it seems like something amazing will happen.’

Yu Yiseol was currently in a state of enlightenment. Although it usually didn’t occur in such a random fashion, enlightenment always comes on suddenly. Who knew when or even if she would ever have another opportunity like this!

Some people fight and struggle their entire lives without ever experiencing enlightenment, while others reach that state from ordinary tasks like eating. This wasn’t something that could be sought after with effort or because one desires it to happen.

It depends on the will of heaven.

And the greatest miracle that occurred to Yu Yiseol was not simply enlightenment. It was that Chung Myung was by her side at the time she entered her trance.

Basically, those who fall into a trance forget themselves and their surroundings, focusing solely on using their sword. During this, they develop their own sword or the next level of their sword, and sometimes they achieve a higher realm.

That was why nobody should tamper or touch them. A serious accident could happen if the opponent didn’t understand how to properly handle the sword.

But who is Chung Myung?

He is an amazing martial artist who understands all of Mount Hua’s sword techniques and set foot on a plateau no one had ever climbed before. With his current body, attaining enlightenment might not be possible, but it will be difficult to find anyone in Mount Hua who has a better understanding of sword techniques.

Even if one considers the entire history of Mount Hua, one might not find a greater master.

So, he could intervene in Yu Yiseol's trance and guide her to a higher realm…

'Why did that bastard have to show up!'

It is even more difficult to lead one in front of others. If something went wrong, it would turn into a bigger problem.

Chung Myung glanced at Yu Yiseol.

'What can I do? This is your luck.'

Although it was a pity that he couldn't help someone who might lead Mount Hua, Chung Myung didn't feel much regret since that ship had already sailed.

'But it's another thing altogether to beat the guy who made you miss the ship.'

Chung Myung took a couple steps away from Yu Yiseol and glared at Baek Cheon.

"Is this enough?"

"More."

"*Tch.* "

He once again took a couple steps away from Yu Yiseol.

"Good?"

"…are you messing with me? Get out of here. I have no intention of letting you harm Samae."

“Who’s the one causing harm here? You’re the one causing harm.”

“Is that any way to speak to your senior!?”

Chung Myung speechlessly stared at the sky after hearing Baek Cheon’s response.

‘Why are these kids so obsessed with formalities?’

Yu Yiseol was the same, and now Baek Cheon too.

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“Yes, Sasuk. The problem here is Sasuk.”

Baek Cheon stared at Chung Myung with cold eyes.

“I tried to understand the reason for your arrogance.”

What was the result?

The moment Chung Myung arrives, he talks shit and escalates a problem and makes it all about himself, and now he acts like a master… *ah*, the problem here is also because of him, right?

“But my patience has its limit, and there are people in this world who don’t understand words.”

“Wow…”

Baek Cheon frowned at Chung Myung’s exclamation.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Nothing, nothing at all. It’s just a bit funny.”

“What is?”

“You wouldn’t understand even if I told you.”

It’s been a hundred years, and he was saying the same thing Chung Myung used to say when he was a Sahyung.

- There is no use talking to you.

- Rather than discussing the path of Dao to Sahyung, it would be faster to recite it to a cow or a hen.

- Don’t bother speaking if you can’t fight.

Humans are so similar.

Otherwise, Chung Myung hasn’t changed much in a hundred years.

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Baek Cheon sharply called out to Chung Myung, who was chuckled in reminiscence.

“Raise your sword. Today, I will teach you what manners are.”

“Will you be fine?”

“Bastard!”

“No. No. not that… but, if you are in a hurry.”

As Chung Myung spoke, Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes.

“What do you want to say?”

“No, I’m just worried. If news got out that Sasuk fought with his sajae then your name might be tarnished.”

Baek Cheon laughed bitterly.

“After coming this far, now you want to play that card? You’re wrong if you think that your peers or the elders will protect you. Perhaps in the future, but at this moment there is no one that can save you. As for my punishment, I will accept it later.”

“*Ohh*, I haven’t heard such a manly speech in a while.”

Chung Myung nodded his head.

“But I have a better idea, would you like to hear it?”

“…what are you planning?”

“No. Nothing, let’s each just swear an oath. We won’t tell another soul about what happens here tonight.”

“What?”

Chung Myung smiled.

“I’m saying that even if I get beaten, I won’t tell any of the elders or anyone else.

Likewise, you can’t run and tell anyone if you lose this battle. Do you understand

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what I’m saying?”

Baek Cheon looked at Chung Myung.

‘What is he thinking?’

Baek Cheon examined Chung Myung’s expression then smiled.

“It looks like you are trying to get out of this situation, but do you think I’ll care if you try these tricks? You—”

“No, that’s not the case.”

Chung Myung sighed, unable to overcome his frustration.

“I am saying that we should throw away the titles of Sasuk, Sajae and Sahyung and have a clean fight.”

“…”

“If we make a promise to each other, that no matter what happens, I will not reach out to my seniors. I will stand here and fight my best. Of course, the same goes for Sasuk too, what do you think?”

Baek Cheon had a subtle smile.

“Alright, it seems you have quite a manly side to you. If you want, then I swear. I won’t tell anyone what happens here.”

From Baek Cheon’s point of view, there was no reason not to accept that offer.

The most difficult part of beating Chung Myung would be dealing with the Un disciples or the elders. Wasn’t it obvious that they were all protective of Chung Myung? So, if news got out that Baek Cheon attacked him, wouldn’t it cause an endless amount of trouble for him?

Yet now Chung Myung himself wanted to keep this matter hidden? There was no reason for Baek Cheon to refuse.

But… he couldn’t erase this weird feeling inside him.

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“Then I swear.”

“You seriously have a manly side as well.”

“Yes. I swear too.”

“Then our grudges will vanish the moment we finish.”

Baek Cheon lifted his shining sword and pointed toward Chung Myung.

“I’ll admit that you’re quite bold. In this fight, I am not your sasuk, nor are you my sajae. I will use this fight to settle all the bad feelings that I have towards you. And you too…”

“Fight?”

At that moment, he heard an eerie voice from Chung Myung.

Baek Cheon looked at Chung Myung with curiosity in his eyes.

‘ *Huh?* ’

Then he noticed.

Chung Myung was smiling, but unlike before, this was an evil grin that distorted his wicked features.

“Fight? You’re going to die now, you bastard.”

Chung Myung said and walked towards Baek Cheon.

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‘Has he lost his mind?’

Baek Cheon couldn’t help but feel flustered.

Chung Myung was walking with his head tilted to the side. It looked like some back-alley gangster walking in to threaten innocent civilians.

There were two reasons why Baek Cheon was flustered.

First, was that Chung Myung acting like a gangster seemed to suit him too well.

Second, the person Chung Myung was currently intimidating was none other than Baek Cheon himself.

‘Did he really lose his senses?’

Baek Cheon was Chung Myung’s sasuk.

Of course, that wasn’t important because they both agreed beforehand that they would leave their titles behind for this battle.

What truly mattered was that Baek Cheon was different from Chung Myung, who had just entered the sect.

Baek Cheon entered Mount Hua when he was even younger than Chung Myung. In other words, he had already spent over 15 years learning martial arts.

But what about Chung Myung?

‘It’s only been half a year since he started.’

Even if Chung Myung began training within his mother's womb, he would still have spent less time practicing than Baek Cheon. Even if Chung Myung was talented enough to become the world's greatest master, right now, it was impossible for him

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to defeat Baek Cheon.

Even those with talent need time to properly develop.

If talent alone could surpass the walls of time, then would anyone even try to master martial arts?

'But… what is with his reaction?'

However, Chung Myung acted as if he truly believed he could defeat Baek Cheon.

Baek Cheon was so confused that he couldn't even speak.

"…you're really crazy."

"No. Not at all. The crazy one here is you."

"What?"

"If you weren't crazy, then why would you try and challenge me?"

If those who were entangled with Chung Myung in the past were present, they would all vigorously be nodding their heads.

The Southern Edge Sect called him the devil that descended from Mount Hua, and the Wudang sect used to say that Chung Myung's name reached the sky, but his evil deeds covered the earth.

‘Fuck you.’

Chung Myung raised his hand.

Surprisingly, Chung Myung wasn’t someone that liked resorting to violence.

…What?

What about all the things he’d done so far?

That was all because the others wouldn’t listen otherwise.

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For Chung Myung, violence was just a means to an end. He ultimately wanted everyone to do well on their own, without Chung Myung having to force them again.

Why would anyone use violence if everything could be settled peacefully? People only got beatings because they refused to listen.

But now, Chung Myung started to think it might be better to use violence as an end rather than means.

“Your self-indulgence knows no bounds. My hands are heavy and full of resen—”

“Come on.”

“—what did you say?”

Chung Myung just shrugged his shoulders,

“I usually don’t like talking before a fight but listen well. In a little while, you won’t be able to speak even if you want to, so just come

at me.”

“Arrogant until the end, you bastard!”

Baek Cheon grabbed his sword.

He also didn’t want to waste any more time.

‘I was going to go easy on him.’

Baek Cheon ground his teeth.

No matter how angry he was, he couldn’t actually cut down his own junior. But Chung Myung could be overwhelmed with swordsmanship. Baek Cheon intended to beat Chung Myung so thoroughly that he would piss himself in fear whenever they crossed paths.

Baek Cheon grasped his sword and rushed towards Chung Myung.

The sword quickly cut through the air towards Chung Myung. It was a sword that seemed different from Yu Yiseol’s. At first glance, they may look similar; however, Baek Cheon’s was heavier and fiercer.

In a way, it was the same as the Southern Edge Sect.

A sword that minimizes the colorful changes that were the basis of Mount Hua’s art to take advantage in a sword fight. With only a moment of inspection, Chung Myung had firmly understood the essence of Baek Cheon’s style.

‘Strange.’

The Southern Edge Sect abandoned their swords and tried to emulate the splendor of Mount Hua. However, Baek Cheon reduced the splendor of Mount Hua's sword to achieve the simplicity of the Southern Edge Sect.

'Well.'

Thinking about it, it is normal.

All sword arts undergo constant changes, and those changes are always seeking to advance the style. Naturally, one would seek inspiration for their swordsmanship from those who are in a better condition than themselves.

In Mount Hua's heyday, the Southern Edge Sect was crushed by Chung Myung and would have thought that a flashier sword was the answer.

On the other hand, the second-class disciples of the current Mount Hua were crushed by the Southern Edge Sect through the conference and desperately recognized the gap between their skills. They must have considered the sword of the Southern Edge Sect to be the right answer.

It was understandable that both sects would resemble one another.

But!

'Pathetic fools.'

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

Does that mean Baek Cheon learned the style of the Southern Edge Sect because there was nothing more for him to learn here? Well, Chung Myung didn't like this bastard from the start.

‘An idiot who doesn’t even understand what he has now covets someone else’s art?’

Chung Myung must let him know. What Mount Hua has.

Baek Cheon rushed in.

“I am going to change your attitude today.”

Chung Myung clenched his fist as he watched Baek Cheon rushing towards him.

“I’ll change!”

He put the right foot back.

“That habit of yours!”

And tilted his back a little.

“Which!”

The fist pulled back and then extended forward.

“No one fixed till now, you son of a bitch!”

Pride.

Chung Myung’s fist penetrated through the changes made in Baek Cheon’s sword. A fist that stretched out at an accurate angle and appropriate speed, aiming between the changes and transitions.

Baek Cheon was shocked as he saw the fist of Chung Myung piercing through the sword technique.

It was easy to say that it could be done. However, it was absurd that Chung Myung could accurately shove his fist through a sword art that could easily slice his arm off.

From Baek Cheon's point of view, it felt as if the arm of a ghost had emerged from the abyss.

But there was no time to be surprised.

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Tuk!

Baek Cheon's jaw was hit.

Drrrrk!

And he heard a squeaking sound behind his neck. In an instant, his consciousness flew away, then swiftly returned.

When he came to his senses, his body had been knocked back repeatedly, bouncing off the ground.

'What?'

What just happened?

His senses had dulled for a moment. Baek Cheon didn't realize what had happened to his body when he bounced back. He was overtaken with a distant understanding of reality.

Kuk!

"*Kuak!* "

The moment his body settled on the ground, an indescribable pain shook him to the core.

“*Ackk!* ”

His back was fine. But searing pain radiated from his jaw, where Chung Myung had struck.

Grabbing his chin, Baek Cheon groaned.

Learning martial arts meant that one had to get used to suffering. It wasn’t simply pain from pushing the body to its limit but also frequent injuries from training and sparring.

But this was unlike any pain Baek Cheon had suffered before. It really felt like a new world of pain had opened up for him.

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“Wake up, you bastard.”

Chung Myung said while tilting his head and approaching Baek Cheon.

Seeing that, Baek Cheon got up.

Chung Myung seemed a bit surprised.

“*Oh?* You actually got up?”

Obviously, he got up!

While he was enduring the pain in his jaw, Baek Cheon felt like his heart was being rent as Chung Myung mocked him. Baek Cheon struggled to comprehend the current situation.

He desperately tried to calm his trembling legs and raised the sword again. The bitter taste of blood in his mouth clearly reminded him of reality.

“H-How?”

Baek Cheon was not stupid.

The earlier exchange was no accident. No one in this world would risk losing their arm to a sword technique for a chance at a lucky strike.

In other words, Baek Cheon’s sword was clearly visible to Chung Myung’s eyes.

“How did you do that?”

Chung Myung looked at Baek Cheon as if he were pathetic.

“Your technique reduces the myriad changes and flows between changes depending on how you choose, but so what? Did you think that your technique was flawless?

Really, for every one thing that you know there are two things you don’t. Of course, there are gaps in your sword art!”

Baek Cheon stood there wide-eyed.

“N-No one managed to find them till now.”

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“Obviously, because the people you were dealing with were stupid. Any elder could have figured it out immediately.”

Wait, maybe not?

Uh… what was the level of the current elders? *Huh?*

Leave that aside.

“You mean my sword is wrong?”

“Yeah.”

Chung Myung spoke as if he didn’t even need to think about it.

“For now, you must be able to stand ahead of your peers by a little bit. But as time passes, your sajaes will start to outpace and overtake you.”

“How can you know that!? You only recently joined the sect! I can’t believe your words! I won’t!”

“*Ah*. Do whatever you want.”

Chung Myung smiled bitterly.

The disciples of Mount Hua were committing the same mistake the Southern Edge Sect did, and Chung Myung could even understand their reasons.

‘It isn’t that strange.’

Perhaps, even in Chung Myung’s time, something like this happened countless times.

At the time, however, Chung Myung simply didn’t know what consequences such a change could bring.

Due to Chung Myung’s vast experience, his eyes could see how someone’s sword would develop. Seeing young disciples who were only beginning to develop their style, things that had never been noticed before began to appear.

“Be grateful that I am a disciple of Mount Hua.”

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“What?”

Chung Myung raised his wooden sword.

Honestly, Chung Myung still wanted to crush Baek Cheon, but wasn’t he also one of Mount Hua’s cute disciples? Even if he was going to be crushed, it would be nice to beat him in a way that would help his development.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take you down with a sword instead of a fist. *Ah,* I’m so kind.”

“…”

Is Chung Myung crazy?

No, he really is crazy, right?

Seeing the bewildered expression on Baek Cheon, Chung Myung took a deep breath.

“Some say that the purpose of Mount Hua’s sword was to resemble plum blossoms.

But that is only what those who are unfamiliar with Mount Hua’s sword say. Mount Hua’s sword doesn’t imitate plum blossoms. The sword of Mount Hua aims for…”

Chung Myung, who had been speaking seriously, suddenly frowned.

“*Ah*, never mind. Do you understand what I am saying? Sometimes it’s easier to understand when your body gets beaten rather than

with your brain. I’m coming!”

“*Uh, Huh?* ”

Without realizing it, Baek Cheon took a step back.

However, the speed at which Chung Myung rushed toward him was twice as fast.

Baek Cheon swung his sword and tried to stall Chung Myung. Even if he was injured, his instincts as a swordsman still allowed his body to react before he had time to process what was happening.

At that moment, Baek Cheon noticed.

The image of Chung Myung’s fingers slightly trembled, then the wooden sword

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multiplied into dozens or more and filled his vision.

‘W-what is that…?’

“Thighs!”

Twack!

The wooden sword hit Baek Cheon’s thigh, and he opened his mouth with tears brimming in his eyes.

But it didn’t end there,

“Wrist!”

Thwack!

Chung Myung's sword precisely struck Baek Cheon's wrist, which was holding the sword. From wrist to hand, it felt like his arm went numb for a moment, and he lost grip on his sword.

'H-Hold on… '

At that moment, Baek Cheon's ears were filled with a sound he dreaded hearing.

"Head! Head! Head! Head! Head!"

Why not just once, you bastard?

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Baek Cheon was hit by a series of blows, feeling like his head was going to explode; his mouth fell open as his eyes rolled back.

Even as he collapsed, his mind was obsessed over a single thought

'Why did you say head five times but hit me six times?'

It was a question that was left unsolved as his consciousness flew away.

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"*Uh…"*

As soon as Baek Cheon regained his senses, terrible pain came over him. He could barely get up as he groaned in pain from his head which felt like it was splitting open.

‘How long have I been out?’

It felt like a long time had passed as Baek Cheon awoke. As soon as he opened his eyes, he saw the dark sky. Fortunately, it seemed like it had been less than half a day at the most.

“*Ack*.”

When he turned his head to the side, he saw Yu Yiseol slowly wielding her sword in the distance.

‘It doesn’t seem like much time has passed.’

Of course, it wasn’t possible to infer the time from her form alone. A person experiencing enlightenment sometimes doesn’t return to reality for several days or more.

Suddenly, Baek Cheon’s ears were greeted with the sound of an eerie voice which was both familiar and unfamiliar.

“Up already?”

“…”

Baek Cheon’s head reeled around.

The figure of Chung Myung squatting, with a wooden sword draped over his

shoulder, came into his view.

Flinch.

Baek Cheon's body tensed and screamed to retreat before he could calm down and hurriedly move back.

"I guess you are a bit surprised."

Chung Myung smiled.

Baek Cheon stared at Chung Myung with shocked eyes.

'I lost.'

No, it wasn't that he lost.

The fight from before was so embarrassing that it bordered on laughable to discuss victory and defeat. He still didn't understand how it happened; there was only one conclusion he could arrive at.

He was completely outclassed.

Baek Cheon raised his hand and touched his head. His head, which was beaten by Chung Myung, was still ringing like a bell.

But it wasn't something to be embarrassed about. The scoundrel who knocked him out cold was watching him with eyes wide open.

"Can I ask you one thing?"

"Sure."

"…how are you so strong?"

"What?"

Chung Myung looked at Baek Cheon.

'Interesting.'

Usually, people who experience such nonsensical things are unable to accept reality.

Even when the result was clear and obvious, they would kick and scream in denial and lash out like a wild boar.

In particular, those overly boastful types that are full of pride never seem to admit defeat until they've been beaten again and again.

However, Baek Cheon managed to acknowledge reality rather quickly, despite his prideful nature.

That's at least one thing that deserves to be praised, but…

"It's not that I'm strong, it was sasuk that was weak."

"Me?"

"Yes."

Baek Cheon's eyes trembled a little.

"I'm… weak?"

"Yes."

Baek Cheon staggered and rose to his feet, glaring at Chung Myung with eyes that could kill.

"Don't ignore me. I am Baek Cheon. The great sahyung of the Baek disciples and the person who will one day lead the Mount Hua sect."

"*Uh*, right."

Chung Myung politely nodded his head. There didn't seem to be anything wrong with Baek Cheon's words.

There was just one thing.

“But that doesn’t mean that you aren’t weak.”

“…”

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As Baek Cheon couldn’t refute, Chung Myung raised his finger and pointed to his senior.

“A frog in the well.”

“…”

“That’s the right phrase for sasuk right now. A well so narrow that even passing frogs wouldn’t think of entering it, and a frog with its inflated ego trapped at the bottom.”

Baek Cheon’s face was distorted.

“And I’m the frog?”

“Yes.”

“Me?”

Chung Myung grinned at Baek Cheon, who couldn’t admit the truth and continued to ask the same question.

“You are the frog, Sasuk.”

“…”

“Sasuk should already know that Mount Hua is on the verge of ruin.”

“…of course.”

It was harsh to say that it was on the verge of ruin, but there was no denying that it had fallen.

And it was Baek Cheon’s role to resurrect Mount Hua. At least, that was what he had believed until now.

“That’s why I’ve been trying so hard till now. To somehow make Mount Hua…”

“Sasuk?’

Chung Mung looked at Baek Cheon with absurd eyes.

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“When did you try hard?”

“…”

Baek Cheon was at a loss for words at Chung Myung’s question.

“It doesn’t seem like that to me at all. It looks like a bunch of kids left to go play house and close up together, before returning and partying at a restaurant. Drinking and congratulating one another on a job well done. Even now, when the conference is fast approaching, aren’t you and the other sasuks wasting time bullying the third-grade disciples? What effort? What ‘trying hard’ are you doing?”

Baek Cheon went silent.

Until now, he never thought that he lacked effort. However, he couldn’t say anything when Chung Myung pointed out his inadequacies.

“It seems like sasuks don’t know what hard work truly is. Doing everything you want to do and investing the remaining time to train isn’t working hard nor is it effort.”

“…”

“Sasuk didn’t really try till now, you just wanted to rule over a small kingdom called Mount Hua. There was no competition for you around and no one who could nag you. It was a comfortable setting for you, right?”

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

“No, No. Don’t make such a face. I am not criticizing Sasuk. But if you refuse to be compared to others and want to live like a king here, you shouldn’t be talking about how hard you’ve tried.”

Chung Myung said sullenly.

“Have you ever had a proper fight with anyone?”

“…”

“At best, you would have confronted the Southern Edge Sect. Sasuk, the Southern Edge sect may be treated like the grim reaper here, but the Southern Edge sect is

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likely near the bottom of the Ten Great Sects. The disciples of the other Nine Great Sects are soaring through the sky, are you strong enough to fly with them? You think you’re strong? Sasuk?”

Chung Myung had a smirk on his face.

“Don’t get me wrong, you frog. It isn’t that I’m strong, you are weak.”

An alarm rang loudly in Baek Cheon's head.

'Am I weak?'

He didn't want to admit it.

However, there wasn't a single mistake in Chung Myung's words.

Mount Hua was struggling to contend with the Southern Edge Sect. Actually, even if he took part in the conference and managed to defeat them, there were other sects stronger than them.

"…then does that mean there are people stronger than you in the other great sects too?"

"What bullshit. I am the strongest!"

"…"

'You aren't making any sense, you bastard!'

"But it's not because I am stronger than Sasuk. Right now, Sasuk wouldn't even be able to beat over the Southern Edge sect. Of course, it's not even worth comparing you to the Shaolin and Wudang sects."

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

However, Chung Myung threw another sharp word at Baek Cheon without mercy.

"So, even if it wasn't me, there are plenty of people that could defeat Sasuk. Do you understand?"

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‘I understand… but I don’t want to understand.’

Who would ever want to acknowledge that they were just another grain of sand in this world?

But Baek Cheon clenched his teeth without protesting.

“I know.”

“…”

“You think that a disciple of Mount Hua doesn’t understand that? I know. I certainly know. But it doesn’t matter. I am not a disciple of the Wudang sect, so I have no choice but to work hard with what I have!”

“But you didn’t work hard, Sasuk.”

Chung Myung said with a sullen face.

“You didn’t try enough, and the direction of your effort was wrong anyway. Do you think someone can become a master just by working hard? Then you should give this up and try to do that. After five hundred years of beating up scarecrows, maybe you’ll finally be able to properly use your sword.”

Chung Myung had refined pissing people off with his words to an art form.

While frowning deeply, Baek Cheon asked.

“So, you know how I should train?”

“I think I at least know better than Sasuk.”

Chung Myung smiled.

At that, Baek Cheon sighed.

‘Goblin-like bastard.’

Baek Cheon couldn’t understand this child. How could he be strong and bold? How did he still have that relaxed expression on his face? He couldn’t understand.

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‘That’s why he can confidently act so cocky.’

In Chung Myung’s eyes, the Baek disciples are nothing more than fools with no skills that argue and harass others with their authority.

Even if their situations were reversed, he would have only acted worse than Chung Myung.

Just one thing was certain now.

Chung Myung was stronger than Baek Cheon could imagine. He didn’t know how, but he was stronger than the Baek disciples.

Even if Baek Cheon sparred with Un Am or Un Geom, he wouldn't be defeated as disastrously as this.

After a moment of hesitation, Baek Cheon looked at Chung Myung with determined eyes.

“Then, can you make me strong?”

“*Huh?* ”

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes.

‘I knew it! This guy is definitely strange.’

Baek Cheon had great pride yet remained aware of reality. Usually, when one thing goes wrong, everything goes wrong.

Putting that bluntly, this bastard was a prideful person who knew his situation very clearly.

Wasn’t this the most terrifying aspect of a human?

But it wasn’t bad, especially not for a martial artist. In the end, such a person will become strong. Or perhaps his pride could drive him to become the strongest.

“Of course, that’s possible.”

Baek Cheon quietly nodded his head.

“Then…”

Bowing, with both hands outstretched to beg,

“*Uh?*”

Baek Cheon spoke in a serious tone.

“Please, make me strong. I will do anything you ask of me.”

“…”

Baek Cheon lifted his head and continued.

“If I can become strong, I wouldn’t hesitate to learn from Sajae. If our relationship as Sasuk and Sajae is a burden to you. I will not treat you as one—”

“Don’t want to.”

“—As a teacher… *Huh?* ”

Chung Myung answered again.

“No, I don’t want to.”

“…Why?”

Baek Cheon asked.

Wait, wasn’t he saying all that nonsense to Baek Cheon because he wanted this to happen?

“Why should I? It’s bothersome.”

“…”

“And you seem to be mistaken, Sasuk.”

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“What?”

“It isn’t over yet.”

Chung Myung stood up, raised the wooden sword, and spun it around.

“There is something very strange about humans. They don’t think about what they’ve done and come to compromises in their own minds. They always think they’ve done enough to repent for their crimes.”

“…”

“Yep, right, that’s right. You must pay for your sinful actions. Have you paid? Bullshit!

Maybe you paid enough for how much you harassed the third-class disciples, but!”

Chung Myung’s eyes were blazing.

“My anger will not subside with just that!”

‘No, you idiot!’

Baek Cheon stepped back, terrified.

However, Chung Myung slowly approached Baek Cheon with a reaper-like smile.

“You still don’t get it, right?”

“No! I get it. I’m already convinced too!”

“No, No. Sasuk doesn’t understand yet. It’s clear from what happened just now.”

‘Why do you get to decide whether I understand or not!?’

He said he gets it!

“Don’t worry. The night is long. I’ll make sure to convince you tonight. Why, just why my Sasuk is so weak and why my Sasuk’s sword is wrong. And…”

Chung Myung’s eyes shone again.

“Why you shouldn’t touch me.”

“…”

“*Ehehehehe!* I am coming!”

“*Eikk!* ”

Sadly, Baek Cheon’s screams couldn’t reach Mount Hua.

Unfortunately for him.

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Thud!

Chung Myung refreshingly stretched his body as he watched Baek Cheon collapse once more to the ground.

“*Ah*, it feels like I’ve been relieved of a ten-year-indigestion.”

Chung Myung smiled as he looked at Baek Cheon, who was completely out cold and unable to move.

“I did my best.”

Although a bit heavy-handed, Chung Myung beat Baek Cheon without leaving any lasting injuries on his body. Even though he fainted, he would be fine once he woke up. Though, the pain would linger for around a day.

“Right, it feels comfortable to just beat up your problems like this!”

Chung Myung turned around. Whether Baek Cheon and the others could compete in the conference wasn’t Chung Myung’s problem.

“…no.”

Come to think of it, he didn’t want to see the Southern Edge bastards act triumphantly in front of him.

“*Hmm*. So how— *ackk!* Shit! You shocked me!”

As Chung Myung was squatting and contemplating, he was suddenly startled and quickly escaped to the side. Yu Yiseol had appeared in front of him, squatting and staring without warning.

“*A-ah* seriously! Are you a ghost!?”

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He had to do something about her. If this kept happening, again and again, he was bound to die from a heart attack before Mount Hua could even revive.

“Announce yourself when you appear! Say something!”

“I did!”

“When!”

“Before, when you were beating him.”

“…”

Chung Myung glanced at Baek Cheon, who was laid out like a corpse and turned to Yu Yiseol.

A soft smile on her lips.

“You saw that?”

“Yes.”

“You saw everything?”

“Only from a little while ago.”

“*Hmm*.”

“Are you going to kill me?”

“No, that’s a bit too far.”

She always goes for killing and murder.

Chung Myung closely examined Yu Yiseol’s head.

And tilted his head.

“What?”

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“No, I just thought that if I slapped the back of your head a little, you might forget what you saw. Amnesia or something.”

“…I forgot.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I forgot everything.”

She’s dull but has great survival instincts.

Chung Myung narrowed his eyes as Yu Yiseol spoke.

“Instead, teach me that sword.”

This woman never gives up! What is going on in her head?

He had barely escaped before, but it wasn’t possible anymore. Hadn’t she even seen Chung Myung happily beating Baek Cheon? He couldn’t hide his skills anymore.

Then, he should change his strategy.

Chung Myung took a deep breath and began to speak.

“Why do you want to learn it?”

“…”

Maybe it was an unexpected counterattack because Yu Yiseol slightly flinched. She looked at Chung Myung with a somewhat shocked expression. To show such an expression on her face…

‘She’s the kind that can’t lie.’

Yu Yiseol hesitated for a moment and then opened her lips.

“I cannot tell you the reason but…”

Yet, there was sincerity in her hesitancy.

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“I need to master that sword art.”

Chung Myung looked at Yu Yiseol.

‘I don’t think she’s interested merely because she thinks it’s pretty.’

There was a certain eagerness in her eyes. She was safeguarding a story that gave birth to her stubbornness. A tale that Chung Myung hadn’t the faintest idea about.

“So, you want to learn that technique?”

Yu Yiseol decisively nodded.

“You don’t need to.”

“*Huh?* ”

“It was originally Mount Hua’s sword art. If you wait, you will naturally be able to learn it.”

“…Mount Hua no longer teaches it.”

“*Oh?* ”

She knows that it no longer exists in Mount Hua?

Then, she recognized that the sword Chung Myung unfolded was the Plum Blossom Sword technique. To be precise, though, it was Chung Myung’s variation of the Plum Blossom Sword technique.

Chung Myung nodded.

“Yes. It’s not in Mount Hua right now.”

“…”

“But it’ll be back soon. Once the time is right.”

“Time?”

Chung Myung looked at Yu Yiseol. Instead of answering her question, he stretched his hand out and pointed at the sky.

Soon, Chung Myung's finger smoothly cut through the air.

At first, Yu Yiseol tilted her head as if she couldn't understand the gestures. Soon, however, she realized that his hand was drawing a sword path and observed it seriously.

"Yue Maiden Sword?"

"That's right."

Yu Yiseol gasped upon seeing Chung Myung's gestures.

It was definitely the Yue Maiden's Sword.

The technique that she had polished and honed for the longest time.

However, Chung Myung's Yue Maiden Sword differed from Yu Yiseol's. Rather than a difference in the movements, there seemed to be a more fundamental difference.

When the variable short and long hand gestures ended, Yu Yiseol sighed quietly.

"Did you understand?"

Yu Yiseol shook her head.

"No. I don't understand a thing."

The moment Chung Myung was about to say something, Yu Yiseol spoke up first.

“But it’ll be my task to figure it out. I think I know what you are talking about. You mean that I can’t begin learning it unless I reach a certain level, right?”

“Yes.”

“I must lay the foundation by refining what I have now.”

“You are good.”

Yu Yiseol nodded.

“I know.”

Chung Myung looked at Yu Yiseol.

‘I thought she was dumb, but I guess she has a good head.’

After all, the mind and the personality are separate things.

“Right. But, if you tell anyone about what happened here today, I will never teach you.”

“I won’t speak a word about it.”

“Very nice. That’s a good girl.”

As Chung Myung nodded, Yu Yiseol narrowed her eyes.

“I am your senior, and you are my junior.”

“I know, I know. Right, good girl.”

“…”

Chung Myung could see Yu Yiseol's hand tightly clenching her sword.

Chung Myung quickly turned around.

"Then, until we meet again, Sago. Don't come to me before then. It's annoying."

"Excuse me…"

Yu Yiseol reached out and tried to catch Chung Myung, but he didn't wait around and immediately headed down the mountain.

"*Ah*! And throw that idiot inside his room. If you leave him there, he will just die of shock when he gets up."

Yu Yiseol sighed at Chung Myung's words which echoed from afar.

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'Plum Blossoms.'

The tip of Chung Myung's sword released the Plum Blossoms.

A sight she had been unable to see despite all her time spent in Mount Hua.

Just…

Yu Yiseol closed her eyes.

The sword moved inside her mind. The tip of the sword smoothly sliced through the air before shaking; then, it began to release brilliantly bright and clear plum blossoms.

Plum Blossoms.

At the end of the sword

The man holding that sword.

‘Father.’

-I will certainly restore this technique. One day, I’d like to return to Mount Hua and repent for my sins with this. Yiseol. Come with me. There’s no place better than Mount Hua.

Yet, he didn’t manage to make the plum blossoms bloom fully in the end.

But now, right in front of her, was a person who could make it happen.

“I must learn it.”

At all costs

Bang!

Chung Myung sprinted through the door of the White Plum Blossom Boarding Hall.

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“*Eik!* ”

“He’s here!”

And was met with a strange reaction.

“What?”

Although it was early morning, it seemed like Yoon Jong and Jo Gul were waiting for him on the first floor.

“It seems like your training has gotten a bit too comfortable. Are you here to check up on me?”

“No, this place was a mess!”

“*Huh?* ”

“Baek Cheon Sahyung was missing, so the Sasuks all came and checked this place out.”

Those disgusting bastards.

Why would they come to this dorm if Baek Cheon went missing? Did they think Chung Myung kidnapped him?

Ah.

‘I didn’t think about that. I could have kidnapped him and beat him up in secret.’

It seemed like some intelligent kids were mixed in with the second-class disciples.

“They’re tossing accusations out without any proof. It pisses me off.”

Hearing those words, Yoon Jong smiled.

“I guess it wasn’t you! Thank god—”

“They were right, though”

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“…”

‘If they were right then why are you getting offended!? Why!?’

No, that wasn’t important.

“You were with Baek Cheon Sahyung?”

“Yes.”

“Wait, I guess… this isn’t what I think it was right?”

“What do you think it was?”

Yoon Jong smiled a bit awkwardly.

“It’s unlikely. I know you’re a very thoughtful person, so what I am thinking about probably didn’t happen, but I hope that you didn’t decide to hit Sahyung’s face or punch him in the stomach like you said before…”

“What’s the difference between the two?”

“Attacks to the face add bonus damage.”

Jo Gul nodded in agreement as if acknowledging the truth of that statement. Chung Myung waved his hands in the air.

“*Eh*. It isn’t like I am some kid.”

“N-No. Right. Chung Myung! This Sahyung always believed in you. No matter how crazy you are, you wouldn’t hit our Sasuk.’

“I didn’t hit him.”

“Right!”

“I beat the shit out of him.”

“Right. Shit out of him. Baek Cheon is already a shitty person—what?”

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Yoon Jong’s face trembled.

“Beat?”

“Yes.”

“Who? Our Sasuk?”

“It’s a j–joke, right?”

“No way. Am I a person that jokes about a beating?”

At that moment, Yoon Jong rushed to Chung Myung at the speed of light and shook him by the collar.

“Hey, you crazy dog! Do you always have to do your best, even when you’re causing trouble!? What do we do if he tells someone what happened!? This is all because you don’t understand how serious the crime of assaulting a senior within the same sect is.

“Oh, my god!”

Chung Myung kicked Yoon Jong.

After lightly disposing of Yoon Jong, Chung Myung caressed his neck.

“I already know all that. There won’t be any problems, so quit worrying. Don’t you know how I handle things?”

“…I know. I know.”

Yoon Jong said slowly.

“*Oh*, my God. Even if you’ve lost your mind, this is too much. How can you hit our Sasuk? There are some sins that should never be committed.”

“When did he ever follow rules?”

“*Ugh*…”

Yoon Jong groaned at the cruel truth which emerged from Jo Gul’s lips. Tears stung his eyes when he thought of what would happen in the morning.

“What is with this atmosphere? Do you think I would handle this situation poorly?”

“…so, what did Sasuk say?”

“He asked me to make him stronger.”

“What?”

Both Yoon Jong and Jo Gul looked at Chung Myung in shock at that unexpected answer.

Chung Myung slowly asked them.

“How is that?”

“…”

“…”

The two looked at each other.

‘Does this make sense?’

‘No, thinking about it, not a single thing makes sense here anymore.’

‘But… even Sasuk?’

‘We are Sahyungs… ’

A widow knows how another widow feels. Since they suffered similarly, they could understand how Baek Cheon felt when he said that.

“S-so what did you say? Did you agree?”

“No. I just beat him up.”

“You beat him?”

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“Yes.”

“Why?”

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders.

“Does there need to be a reason? To feel relieved. I just beat him until I felt better.”

“…”

At that moment, Yoon Jong regretted not training hard before Chung Myung arrived.

If he had the chance to return to his past, he was confident that he would train without a moment's rest until the moment Chung Myung appeared.

Only then would Yoon Jong be capable of smashing Chung Myung in the face, at least one time.

It was then that Yoon Jong realized there was no way to stop a madman from running amok if that man was powerful.

"Don't worry about anything and just go to sleep. You'll find out the results once you wake up."

"…"

"Sleep tight."

Chung Myung moved upstairs, while Jo Gul and Yoon Jong sighed deeply.

"…do you think it's true?"

"There's one thing I realized about Chung Myung."

"What is it?"

"Even if he speaks bullshit, he never lies."

"…what a great thing to realize."

A very great thing. You bastard.

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"But Sahyung."

“Yes?”

“Doesn’t this mean that Baek Cheon Sasuk attacked Chung Myung first?”

“…”

“Isn’t that how it is?”

“He’ll speak bullshit, but he doesn’t lie.”

“It sounds unbelievable. But even Baek Cheon Sasuk got beaten.”

“The one that did it was Chung Myung.”

“…that sounds convincing.”

Yoon Jong shook his head and looked up at the stairs Chung Myung had used.

There was a monster dwelling in the White Plum Blossom Boarding house.

Where was Mount Hua heading? Mount Hua…

Yoon Jong wanted to cry.

Yoon Jong’s eyes narrowed as he looked around.

There were none.

He couldn’t see a single one.

Unlike yesterday, he couldn’t see any of the second-class disciples that had frequently been tormenting them recently.

‘Was it true?’

It’s not that Yoon Jong didn’t trust Chung Myung’s words.

As Jo Gul said, Chung Myung was a person who spoke nonsense but didn’t lie.

The problem was that Chung Myung’s ‘solution’ was far from the solutions that ordinary people would think of.

So, he thought that this would cause more trouble…

‘He seems to have solved everything well?’

He had doubts about how it was solved, but he surely settled the matter.

“Sahyung. It seems like Chung Myung’s words were true, right?”

“…”

Yoon Jong nodded at Jo Gul’s words.

But was it really plausible for things to be this simple?

‘If we encounter problems with Sasuk, are we supposed to spar and defeat them to

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solve the problem?’

Even ignoring common sense, wasn't this abandoning the rules of the sect and coming up with their own way to solve the issue?

The problem was that this madman's method actually worked.

'Just what is going to happen to Mount Hua in the future?'

Yoon Jong never thought of himself as a grumpy figure, but when he saw how Chung Myung behaved, he began to feel like being a grumpy old man wasn't such a bad thing.

Wouldn't it be a beautiful world if that grumpy bastard could keep things in order?

"What are you thinking?"

"…I was thinking about the future of Mount Hua and what it feels like to be an old man."

"…"

Jo Gul.

'Did he finally realize how he acts?'

Yoon Jong sighed, noticing how Jo Gul was looking at him with pitiful eyes.

The third-class disciples who were watching from the side slowly approached Yoon Jong and spoke.

"The dorms seem a little strange today, Sahyung."

"…I guess so."

"Why are they doing this? I'm worried that they're going to do something worse."

“Right.”

Yoon Jong looked up at the distant sky.

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‘These kids also aren’t in their right minds anymore.’

To say that their Sasuk was beaten.

Such a thing would be unimaginable in Mount Hua before Chung Myung arrived.

However, like Yoon Jong and Jo Gul, the third-class disciples also seemed to be getting influenced by Chung Myung’s unreasonable teachings.

If things continued like this, Mount Hua might be filled with people who behave like Chung Myung…

Yoon Jong shuddered; he didn’t want to imagine such a future.

‘Just thinking about it is terrifying.’

The problem was that it seemed like this thought could very well become a reality.

“I’m more anxious because it’s quiet. Should we sneak a peek?”

“I don’t think those idiots have come to their senses already. Doesn’t it seem like they’re up to something? Sahyung?”

‘Oh my God.’

Just where did the trust between fellow sect disciples go?

“It’s noisy. Come and get ready for training!”

“…Yes.”

‘Sajae.’

‘What is with his temper?’

Yoon Jong sighed deeply as he lamented how his juniors looked at him with that question burning in their eyes.

Day by day, Mount Hua was turning away from the Mount Hua Yoon Jong knew. Of course, this change wasn’t necessarily bad, but… he honestly felt that he didn’t want to open his eyes and see the future that Chung Myung would create.

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“Sahyung. Then, did Chung Myung really beat Baek Cheon sasuk?”

Jo Gul asked softly so that the others wouldn’t overhear, and Yoon Jong frowned.

“What are you even asking for? There’s no way he would lie, and if it weren’t for that, the seniors would still be harassing us today.”

“…No. That…”

Jo Gul scratched his head.

“I just can’t understand it. No matter how strong Chung Myung was from the beginning, there’s still a difference in the amount of time he and Baek Cheon sasuk studied martial arts.”

Yoon Jong couldn’t understand either.

‘Does this make any sense at all?’

It made no sense. But wasn’t Chung Myung always doing things that made no sense?

“Then Sahyung, Chung Myung is stronger than Baek Cheon, right?”

“Why do you keep asking such obvious—”

“Then, what about compared to the Southern Edge Sect?”

Yoon Jong went silent.

Compared to them?

This was something Yoon Jong never thought about.

“Chung Myung shouldn’t be inferior to the Southern Edge Sect either, right? He even defeated senior Baek Cheon.”

“*Hmm.* ”

Yoon Jong, with a stiff face, fell into thought.

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“Then, in the conference this time…”

“Gul.”

“Yes, Sahyung.”

“If Chung Myung wins, will it make a difference?”

“…wouldn’t things change?”

Yoon Jong shook his head.

“When a master expert is born in a sect, it’s something to celebrate. However, a single master’s reputation belongs solely to themselves. They can’t do anything alone. The moment that Chung Myung disappears, Mount Hua will fall again like before.”

“…”

“If we truly want to revive Mount Hua, we also need to become strong. We can’t simply rely on Chung Myung. We won’t be able to declare Mount Hua’s revival until the day arrives when the world becomes unable to ignore any random disciple within the sect.”

“Right.”

“But as you said, I am also curious about the conference. This time will be different.”

“What do you mean?”

“Chung Myung…”

Yoon Jong took a deep breath and said,

“Will he truly become a hero that brings change to Mount Hua? Or will he be a tyrant who reigns over this small Mount Hua?”

Yoon Jong and Jo Gul faced each other with serious eyes.

Chung Myung…

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“*Ah*, seriously! Get out of here!”

The two slowly turned their heads towards the sudden interruption.

Chung Myung was swearing as he came down.

"…"

"Isn't that Senior Yu?"

Yu Yiseol was chasing after Chung Myung, who was fleeing with his full might.

"Teach me."

"I already told you that I had nothing to teach! I told you to not come! You horrible leech!"

"The Yue Maiden Sword!"

"Go to Un Geom Sasuk and ask him! He'll teach you!"

"Un Geom Sasuk is a man. The Yue Maiden Sword is a technique for women. It is a skill that Un Geom sasuk cannot handle."

"Then am I a woman? Well? Am I a woman?"

"Teach me."

"*Ahhhhhh!* How do I get through to your mind?"

Chung Myung and Yu Yiseol quickly passed between Yoon Jong and Jo Gul. The two who were left behind stared in bewilderment at the absurd sight.

'When did those two become friends?'

'Did Senior Yu always talk this much? It seems like Yu Sago has spoken more in the past few days than she has in the entire time I've been in the sect.'

'Actually, is it fine for that idiot to talk to Yu Sago like that?'

Well, he has always been arrogant.

“…what you said earlier. Whether he’s a hero or a tyrant.”

“Gul.”

“Yes. Sahyung.”

“Let’s go train.”

“…Yes.”

Baek Sang’s face crumpled.

“Sahyung, are you really going to leave it like that?”

Hearing the dissatisfaction in Baek Sang’s voice, Baek Cheon smiled.

“Why are you so angry?”

“Aren’t they acting too arrogantly! Especially that one, Chung Myung! He doesn’t even show a shred of remorse. Isn’t it alright to punish them now?”

Punish?

You?

Him?

“Someone like you?”

“*Huh?* ”

“Nothing.”

Baek Cheon forced himself to smile.

Although it had died down a little, his entire body throbbed in pain.

Baek Cheon turned his eyes towards Chung Myung, who was fleeing from Yu Yiseol.

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‘Sneaky son of a bitch.’

How could he beat a person so well without leaving any scars on the outside? The more he thought about it, the more absurd this guy seemed.

Thankfully, he avoided being embarrassed in front of others, but he couldn’t even complain about this injustice to anyone. He’d be treated like a madman if he tried to complain about his junior abusing him without even having any visible injuries.

Or maybe he’d be treated as trash with no future prospects.

Of course, even if there were wounds on his body, Baek Cheon would never tell anyone about how he was beaten like a dog. Still, he couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

“Why did you suddenly tell us not to touch the third-class disciples?”

“Baek Sang.”

“Yes. Sahyung. I just don’t understand the reasoning behind it.”

The reasoning was to have a happy life.

Baek Cheon was doing it to avoid getting hit again.

But Baek Cheon could never speak his reasons out loud. He had a dignified image to maintain.

“Isn’t the conference approaching?”

“…That’s right.”

Baek Cheon spoke with a stern expression.

“I was thoughtless. Ruling over the third-class disciples is something we can do at any time. But not the conference. Doesn’t this event only occur once a year?”

Baek Sang silently nodded.

Seeing that Baek Sang still wasn’t fully satisfied, Baek Cheon narrowed his eyes.

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“Governing the third-class disciples is an internal task, and the conference is external work which affects the honor of the Mount Hua sect. The inside is important, but the outside is more urgent. Moreover, considering what happened in the conference last time, let’s put aside everything else for now and concentrate on producing positive results. Everything is at stake this time; don’t you think so?”

“…yes.”

“Right now, our enemy isn’t the third-class disciples, it’s the Southern Edge sect. We shouldn’t forget the reason we spent this last year in closed-door training.”

Baek Sang took a deep breath and lowered his head.

“Sahyung is right. I must have lost focus.”

‘I must have been out of my mind.’

And he was still out of his mind.

Regardless, Baek Cheon was glad that Baek Sang didn’t press the issue any further.

‘Weren’t you the one that started this in the first place? Why are you pretending to be some nice guy now?’

If Baek Sang had decided to ask that question, Baek Cheon would have been at a loss for an answer.

“Thanks for understanding. Let’s not worry about the third-class disciples for now.

Our first priority is to focus everything we have on the upcoming conference. Ask our sajaes to reflect on their martial arts and reflect on what they’ve refined during our closed-door training.”

“Yes, Sahyung!”

Baek Sang bravely gave a loud response.

With that, Baek Cheon lowered his head with an expressionless face.

‘Even after the end of the conference, I don’t plan on touching those third-class disciples.’

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Baek Cheon didn’t want to see what would happen to him and his peers.

Baek Cheon turned to look at Chung Myung off in the distance.

‘We aren’t the only ones who will be surprised.’

Perhaps even more than Mount Hua, the Southern Edge sect would be surprised.

When he thought of the future, the pain of being beaten by Chung Myung slowly vanished… *ah*, never-mind… it didn’t vanish.

It hurt more.

It hurt down to the bone.

‘Damned bastard, why did you have to hit so well!?’

Baek Cheon sighed and turned away.

‘I just need to do what I can do.’

Although he felt that life became twisted because of Chung Myung. Baek Cheon’s purpose, to prove himself in the conference, hadn’t changed.

Considering that the Southern Edge Sect would soon be coming to Mount Hua, he didn’t have the time to behave selfishly now.

This time, he must prove his worth.

But…

Baek Cheon looked back.

“Why does he keep hanging out with Yu Samae?”

He didn’t like it.

Baek Cheon glanced at them and headed to training while suppressing an uneasy feeling.

The conference between Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect was fast

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approaching.

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“Sect leader.”

Hyun Jong silently poured tea into a cup without responding. The fragrant aroma of tea permeated throughout the room.

Whenever he felt angry, Hyun Jong made tea like this. There was nothing like this tea to stabilize his body and calm his mind.

“They will arrive today, Sect Leader.”

“Are the preparations complete?”

“Yes. Sect leader. Nothing will go wrong while welcoming the Southern Edge Sect.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Hyun Jong let out a low sigh.

‘At least this time, I don’t have to feel embarrassed.’

It was shameful to be left behind in martial arts, but what was even more embarrassing was Hyun Jong’s inability to properly treat the Southern Edge Sect disciples last time.

How would Hyun Jong feel if they had no choice but to show the ruined buildings, poor meals, and devastated training halls to Mount Hua’s most bitter rival?

It was a sensitive issue, especially for Hyun Jong, the sect leader of Mount Hua.

It wasn’t easy to tolerate the piercing gazes of the Southern Edge Sect disciples, who looked at him in mockery and disdain. He had no choice but to bite his lip and endure the ridicule in the past.

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“The more I think about it, the more I believe Chung Myung has done a great job.”

Un Am said.

It was well known that Hyun Jong cared deeply for Chung Myung, but Un Am truly understood the heart behind those actions. From Hyun Jong and Un Am’s perspective, Chung Myung was nothing less than a benefactor who helped seal the leaks on their sinking ship and pulled it up from the depths.

This wasn’t just about being able to feed people.

It was a sect with a long history. At the very least, it should have a dignified appearance which makes its history seem plausible to outsiders. Although appearance is nothing more than empty

courtesy, the world still evaluates others based on what could be seen.

People would listen to a scholar before they listened to a beggar.

Chung Myung not only solved Mount Hua's financial woes but also restored the sect's face.

How could Hyun Jong not favor the child?

Un Am's smiling gaze made Hyun Jong feel slightly embarrassed. He lightly coughed before recommending that Un Am have some tea.

"Drink."

"Yes, Sect leader."

Un Am took a light sip from his cup and nodded quietly.

"How is it?"

"It seems to have gotten stronger. It's been dried for a long time, and the taste seems to have faded a bit."

"Yes."

Hyun Jong nodded, pleased with Un Am's analysis.

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"Well-dried plum blossom leaves actually become more fragrant. This is something I only realized after decades of drying plum blossoms."

Hyun Jong looked at the teacup and spoke.

“It is the same with Mount Hua. We merely endured. We vowed to recreate the glory of the past, but the reality is that it was difficult to even survive each day.”

“…Sect Leader.”

Hyun Jong smiled as if to soothe Un Am’s worried tone.

“But we persevered and held on. Finally, this day has come to us. Sometimes, the correct answer is to wait rather than move in haste.”

It was spoken with a strange feeling inside.

Un Am looked at Hyun Jong with renewed vigor.

‘We aren’t the only ones moving forward.’

Occasionally, sect leaders fall under the illusion that their sect has already gone as far as it can. But a man can evolve until the day they die. Hyun Jong, who was walking on the path of a Taoist, would not stop refining himself till the day he stopped breathing.

How could one not trust him?

“Mount Hua’s sect leader will bring back the glory of the past.”

“I would like that, but the credit won’t go to me even if that happens. It will be a result of the disciples’ efforts.”

“How can you say that it’s not your credit, Sect leader?”

“Un Am.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

“I am a man who understands his own shortcomings. If Mount Hua hadn’t collapsed,

would I have ever been asked to be the sect leader? If my Sahyungs hadn't left Mount Hua, I would have spent my time studying scriptures."

Un Am answered in a serious tone.

"By leaving Mount Hua, they proved that they were unworthy of being the sect leader. The sect leader is the most decent and honorable person in Mount Hua."

Hyun Jong smiled without answering.

It's a sad story. So, the conversation needed to be changed.

"So, what do you think about the second-class disciples?"

"Now that they've finished with their training. They are trying to stabilize their minds and bodies."

Un Am's face slightly darkened when the topic shifted to the second-class disciples.

"Sect leader."

"Say it."

"Honestly, I feel a bit worried."

"Worried… why?"

With a low sigh, Un Am continued.

"As I said before, Mount Hua's momentum right now is excellent. But, whether or not we lose momentum, doesn't it all come down to the conference's outcome?"

“Do you believe that the second-class disciples will be unable to handle Southern Edge’s disciples?”

“I want to believe in the children. But… as you know…”

Un Am didn’t try to say more.

He knew that Hyun Jong understood the difference between Mount Hua and the

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Southern Edge Sect.

Mount Hua was barely surviving through the dark history which haunted them for years, while the Southern Edge Sect had been shining and advancing in recent times.

It was natural for a significant difference to exist between them.

No matter how hard the second-class disciples tried, it would be difficult to overcome that gap.

Un Am was worried that the disciples, who had only just found new hope, would once again be captivated by a sense of defeat.

“How about the third-class disciples?”

“…Sorry?”

“Aren’t the third-class disciples also going to participate? Are they all well prepared?”

Un Am was a bit puzzled when Hyun Jong suddenly asked about them, but he had no choice except to answer the sect leader.

“The preparations… seem to be going well.”

Not overdone.

Not too much.

Un Am only briefly saw the third-class disciples training when he would pass by the training grounds on occasion, so he had no choice but to express his opinion so hazily.

Since the children’s training was entirely left to Un Geom, Un Am didn’t feel the need to know or interfere with them and simply thought that they were training normally.

“They’ve only recently begun training…”

Hyun Jong nodded quietly.

He fully understood Un Am’s concerns.

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“Un Am.”

“Yes.”

“What would you do if there was a mountain in front of you?”

“That…”

Un Am couldn’t easily speak.

“Suppose that there is a mountain in front of you that you must cross. If there is a path around it, then you could travel that road. If you have time, then you can rest and climb at your own pace.

However, what if neither option is available and you need to cross it despite that?”

“I am afraid that I wouldn’t be able to overcome that mountain.”

“Even so, you would still gain experience. Next time, wouldn’t we be able to cross the mountain more easily?”

Un Am let out a deep sigh.

He didn’t feel like everything the sect leader said was convincing, but he couldn’t ask anymore because the sect leader said it.

Hyun Jong smiled and spoke when Un Am’s worried expression didn’t fade.

“The Mount Hua and Southern Edge Conference is a venue for such exchanges.”

“…Yes.”

“It doesn’t matter whether we win or lose. What’s most important is who can develop further by using it as a stepping stone.”

“What the Sect Leader said is correct.”

“These guests are coming from far away. Make every effort not to neglect them.”

“I will keep that in mind.”

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Un Am nodded.

“There will be no problems with Elder Hwang of the Eunha Guild either.”

“Elder Hwang… right. I need to meet with Elder Hwang once.”

“Isn’t the sect leader quite busy? I’m sure he will understand.”

“Right. Thank you.”

Since the day Elder Hwang and Eunha came to Mount Hua, they have been pouring funds into the sect. Looking at the scale of investment, it seemed as if they intended to make Hua-Um stand on par with the capital.

“Won’t this cause problems with the Southern Edge Sect?”

“Everything will go smoothly.”

As usual, it will be calm.

Un Am bowed his head and stood up.

“Then, I will go for a final check.”

“You’ve been through a lot.”

“Please, don’t mention it.”

Un Am took a step back.

As he quietly closed the door and went outside, Hyun Jong looked down at the teacup in front of where Un Am sat.

The half-empty teacup had light steam drifting from the surface, seemingly conveying how Un Am felt.

“Winning isn’t important…”

Hyun Jong frowned.

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“Despite being a Taoist, I can lie so casually.”

Hyun Jong was well aware that winning wasn’t important. But this conference was a battle that couldn’t be won, and he was forced to push his disciples into these unwinnable matches.

They couldn’t win without a miracle.

Unless a miracle happens…

Hyun Jong suppressed his heavy heart and closed his eyes.

“It’s still such a small place.”

The disciples of the Southern Edge Sect glanced around at Hua-Um and spoke with a smirk.

Although they had been to this place in the past, this Hua-Um village was very small.

Compared to Xi’an, where they usually went, this was no better than the empty countryside.

“Sahyung. Did Mount Hua really used to be in the Ten Great Sects?”

“Of course.”

“But isn’t this village too small and shabby for a sect that used to be great?”

Jin Geum-Ryong said with a smile.

“You’ve got it backward. This village was only able to form because Mount Hua was here. In the past, Mount Hua was strong enough that this village developed so that the people coming to visit the sect would have somewhere to live.”

“I see.”

Jong Seo-Han nodded as if he finally understood.

“But aren’t they utterly ruined now?”

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“That’s true too.”

Jin Geum-Ryong nodded.

Jong Seo-Han looked around and opened his mouth.

“I honestly don’t know why this pointless event is being held. What’s the point in clashing swords with Mount Hua when the results are obvious? Wouldn’t it be better for us to simply swing our swords on our own?”

“This has been decided by the elders; they have their own plans. Be mindful of what you say.”

“Yes, but…”

Jong Seo-Han slowly turned his head back.

Looking at the person following behind him, he smiled.

“But this time, the conference is quite meaningful. It’s worthwhile to take revenge for those who have been disgraced.”

It was a provocative remark.

However, the one receiving the provocation, Lee Song-Baek, continued walking in silence.

‘That’s no fun.’

Jong Seo-Han narrowed his eyes.

Thanks to Chung Myung’s actions at Elder Hwang’s residence, it became common knowledge within the Southern Edge Sect that the Eunha Guild had chosen to support Mount Hua over themselves.

Of course, despite his actions to repent, Lee Song-Baek drew unfavorable gazes for his role in beating Chung Myung and damaging the sect’s reputation.

‘There’s no reaction, no use teasing him.’

Since that day, Lee Song-Baek has changed as a person. He used to be quite serious, but now he is more reticent and stoic.

“We were disgraced by Mount Hua for the first time in 100 years, so we need to repay this debt, Great Sahyung.”

“That’s right.”

While Jin Geum-Ryong and Jong Seo-Han were walking, Lee Song-Baek walked along without wanting to get involved in their conversation.

His gaze turned toward the towering Mount Hua.

‘Mount Hua?’

When he visited this place in the past, he felt light-hearted. But now, the shadow of one person overlapping Mount Hua could be seen.

‘We may be walking straight into the tiger’s den.’

Lee Song-Baek seemed to see the smiling face of Chung Myung.

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“What the hell!?”

Jong Seo-Han was annoyed as he spoke with a voice full of anger.

Climbing a mountain wasn’t an easy task, even for those who learned martial arts.

This steep mountain looked like it would even be difficult for a bird to ascend.

“I don’t understand what the hell these people thought when they built their sect in a place like this. No wonder their sect is doomed.”

Chung Myung would applaud if he could have heard that statement.

But Jin Geum-Ryong didn’t seem to agree.

“The sect’s location is meaningful; it represents a disciple’s desire to sacrifice and leave behind their mundane and materialistic lives while returning to nature.

Naturally, they would choose a difficult location for outsiders to enter.”

“What sort of place is Mount Hua? It’s only half a sect now. At least if it was the Wudang sect that built this place, it would be understandable.”

“Well, you are right.”

Those who climbed Mount Hua before must have had a hard time, so they built a place to rest. The disciples of the Southern Edge sect were resting there now.

One of the second-class disciples opened his mouth with a sullen expression.

“After going through all this trouble, we should be treated to something amazing.

Instead, they’re going to feed us grass and make us sleep in ruined rooms.”

“I don’t care about the food; I just want to sleep comfortably. Last time, I couldn’t even sleep without worrying that the building would collapse on me.”

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“Even beggars wouldn’t sleep in such a place. What kind of sect is this? This is worse than the Beggars Union.”

Dissatisfaction and scorn mixed into the conversation.

“I think we should stop this useless conference already. We gain nothing from it. We travel so far away to come to Mount Hua and suffer this poor treatment, yet Mount Hua is the only one getting anything good from it.”

Jin Geum-Ryong just shrugged it off.

“I know that everyone is dissatisfied with this, but it would be better for you all to calm down. Don’t you know how the elders feel about Mount Hua?”

“We don’t get it. Why are they so obsessed with a ruined sect?”

“I know.”

“Maybe it’s because of their potential.”

“Potential?”

Someone snorted.

“If they had potential, they would have already changed. Why would they allow themselves to decline for a hundred years if they had some way to reverse the situation?”

“Every sect has its history; what matters is now.”

While everyone was disparaging Mount Hua, one person spoke up.

“You had better not underestimate Mount Hua too much.”

Everyone’s eyes turned together.

Lee Song-Baek.

With an expressionless face, he said.

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“If you do, you may end up disgraced.”

Jong Seo-Han frowned.

“Like Sahyung?”

“…”

Despite the obvious provocation, Lee Song-Baek didn’t respond.

“Don’t worry, Sahyung. We won’t afford Mount Hua any chances. We’ll even break the one that trampled on Sahyung’s dignity for you.”

“I am just saying that you should remain alert.”

“What could staying alert around Mount Hua even do for us?”

“I…”

Lee Song-Baek was about to say something but then sighed slowly. Whatever he said wouldn’t work.

Elder Ki Mok-Seung and Lee Song-Baek had the most horrible experience because of what Chung Myung had done at the Eunha Guild.

In particular, all criticism for the incident had fallen onto Lee Song-Baek. It wasn’t surprising; how could people blame an elder?

“Do as you please. But if you let your guard down, there will be a price to pay.”

As Jong Seo-Han frowned and was about to say something, a soft voice came.

“You aren’t wrong.”

Everyone’s heads turned again.

Everyone stood up when they saw the man slowly ascending the mountain.

“Sit.”

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“Yes.”

The elder of the Southern Edge Sect, Sama Seung1, looked at everyone once and spoke.

“Did you all forget what happened with Eunha?”

When the word Eunha was spoken, Lee Song-Baek flinched. But the other disciples answered without delay.

“I haven’t forgotten.”

Sama Seung’s eyes shone.

“Everything was ruined, and we were put to shame because of that collapsing sect.

Do you understand how angry the sect leader was?”

Everyone bowed their heads at his words.

Not because they did something wrong, but because of the qi releasing from his body.

“It is enough to be disgraced by Mount Hua once. We must not suffer such a disgrace again. Our Southern Edge Sect should rise above the world and stand over others.

How long do you believe we should waste our time fighting with third-class disciples from Mount Hua? You need to put an end to this atrocious relationship! I will not forgive anyone who suffers disgrace

at the hands of Mount Hua, even if it's only due to a moment of carelessness!"

The Southern Edge Sect's disciples held their breath while listening to the cold voice of their elder.

"A general on the battlefield should never have remorse, and a lion should do its best to catch a rabbit. It's not enough to simply defeat Mount Hua; the Southern Edge Sect must be strong enough to trample Mount Hua without even giving them a chance to stand against us. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Elder!"

The sharp eyes of Sama Seung looked around at the disciples and nodded.

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"However, there's a difference between vigilance and fear, right?"

"Yes."

"*Hmm*."

Sama Seung turned and looked at Mount Hua.

"Get up. Now that you've had a good rest, we should arrive before those waiting for us get tired."

"Yes."

The Southern Edge Sect's disciples resumed climbing again.

After climbing the mountain for a long time, the disciples, who had almost arrived at Mount Hua, began to say.

“This is hell.”

“We really shouldn’t come next time.”

“If it’s the same as last time, shouldn’t we reach the gate soon?”

Climbing the steep mountain, they would soon find the ruined sect’s gate.

Seeing the end of their long journey, the disciples rushed to the top.

And they arrived.

“*Huh?* ”

“What is that?”

And were taken aback by the sight in front of them.

Surely, when they came here two years ago, Mount Hua’s gate was old and looked like it would fall apart at any moment. The gate didn’t even function as a gate.

But now, that old gate wasn’t there. They were greeted by a massive door that

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seemed brand new.

‘Am I seeing things?’

‘No way.’

‘This makes no sense. Did someone else come up to Mount Hua and establish their sect here?’

They slowly looked up.

The gate may have changed, but the signboard hanging from the entrance showed that the sect's name remained unchanged. However, the old signboard that was previously crumbling had been replaced with a new one that proudly bore the sect's name.

When they saw the name 'Mount Hua' in the dragon and snake calligraphy, they felt an unfamiliar pressure fall onto them.

"W-what is this…"

It was well-known that the Eunha Guild had joined hands with Mount Hua.

However, the partnership with Eunha was very recent. It was impossible for the sect to rebuild their front gate in such a short amount of time. Not even the Eunha Guild could accelerate development so much.

"This shouldn't be possible."

JIn Geum-Ryong mumbled.

Wasn't this sect supposed to be even worse than the Beggars' Union? Was this the same Mount Hua that was ridiculed for being unable to accept disciples, even when the sect opened its gates to search?

What kind of money did Mount Hua possess to build this gate?

"Silence."

Sama Seung spoke slowly.

“It seems like they begged for money somewhere. But even if they can change the gate, the roots of the sect won’t change. There’s no need to make a fuss out of this.”

“Yes!”

“Don’t act like this changes anything.”

Sama Seung walked towards the gate with a slightly offended expression.

It was then.

Kik!

The huge gates began to open, and a man slowly walked out from inside.

Martial arts head, Hyun Sang.

When he saw the disciples of the Southern Edge Sect approaching, he looked at them.

“You must have been through a lot coming all this way. Elder Sama. I met you once before. I am Hyun Sang, elder of Mount Hua.”

“It’s Sama Seung.”

The elder’s response was very short.

However, Hyun Sang didn’t show any offense and smiled.

“Nice to see you again, Elder Sama.”

“The sect leader hasn’t come out?”

Hyun Sang’s eyes twitched.

“The sect leader is inside.”

“But your guests have traveled from so far away, and he doesn’t even show his face?”

Hyun Sang bit his lip.

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Sama Seung is an elder of the Southern Edge Sect.

Although he was a well-known elder with high status, he wasn’t someone esteemed enough for the sect leader to personally greet.

Sama Seung clearly knows that, but asking for the sect leader meant that he was being openly disrespectful of Mount Hua.

Hyun Sang opened his mouth while holding back the anger which was rising in his chest.

“Let’s head in. A banquet has been prepared to welcome the disciples. It might not be enough, but I hope you will forget the long journey you overcame to come here and enjoy it.”

“Banquet? The Mount Hua and Southern Edge conference isn’t about eating and playing.”

“…We understand that.”

“Still, it is fine. Take the lead. I need to meet the sect leader.”

Hyun Sang let out a low sigh.

‘My words don’t seem to be getting through.’

The Southern Edge Sect acted the same in the past, but it wasn't this extreme.

Perhaps, this was being done with some purpose in mind.

But didn't Hyun Jong already warn the elders not to behave recklessly?

Remembering these words, Hyun Sang choked back his anger and smiled.

"Come with me."

"*Hmm*."

Sama Seung entered with small steps. In the meantime, the newly built gates caught his eye.

'Looks like they got some support.'

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It seemed like some blind fool threw quite a bit of money into Mount Hua. So, the sect used the money to deal with the most urgent issues. The first thing they worked on were things that people could see, like the gates.

But the internal buildings couldn't be…

"What?"

Those who entered the gate let out a gasp.

"T-training hall?"

"When?"

They could clearly see that the training halls were all newly rebuilt with blue tiles laid out over the spacious area as they entered the gate.

‘T-they repaired all of this?’

No, was it all new?

Did the God of Wealth descend on Mount Hua?

“It’s better than the Southern Edge Sect.”

The slight murmur that someone from behind whispered represented the feelings of everyone present. Compared to this, even the Southern Edge Sect looked shabby.

Just two years ago, Mount Hua and everything within were crumbling and in ruins.

When did such a dramatic change occur?

Sama Seung’s face contorted as he came to a halt.

As the elder stopped walking, Hyun Sang looked back and asked.

“Is something wrong?”

“Doesn’t it seem like a lot has changed?”

Hyun Sang smiled and answered.

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“Good things have happened.”

“Does Mount Hua still have someone that supports you? I hope that such a prestigious sect wouldn’t resort to fraud or thievery.”

Instantly, Hyun Sang’s face burned red with fury.

Even if the sect leader had ordered them to maintain peace, this was an intolerable remark.

“Be careful of what you say—”

It was then.

“Fuck you! Do you have a death wish!?”

Everyone’s eyes turned to the voice that came from the side.

Sama Seung’s face went stiff, seeing the scene unfolding in front of him.

‘W-what is he doing?’

His eyes caught sight of a series of disciples running like horses. It appears they had been training for a long time. Their robes were drenched in sweat, and their expressions seemed like they would faint any moment; despite that, they continued to press forward with staggering legs.

It was a bizarre sight.

However, that wasn’t where Sama Seung was looking.

He stared at the one that interrupted their conversation.

Next to the running group stood a person in clean clothes with a calm expression.

Unlike the others, he ran with the group as if he was taking a brisk walk.

A small child.

Sama Seung, who looked at the child, asked in a hoarse voice.

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“What did you just say?”

1. We have decided to use the name Sama Seung (사미승) contrary to the manhwa as we are following the korean wordings in the novel and decided to let the chinese characters be for reference sake. If we decide to use the chinese wording most of the character names would have to be changed. Like, Chung Myung (청명 青明) to Qing Ming↩

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The disciples of Mount Hua, who were exhausted and on the verge of collapse from running, came to a hurried stop. Unfortunately for them, they happened to stop right as the Southern Edge Sect arrived at the same location.

Standing next to the third-class disciples, who were gasping and panting for air, Chung Myung awkwardly tilted his head and looked at Sama Seung.

“Me?”

A face that didn’t seem to understand anything. Seeing the child’s attempt to act innocent, Sama Seung asked again.

“I asked you, what did you just say?”

“*Oh*, that.’

Instead of answering, Chung Myung kicked the already staggering Jo Gul’s shin.

“*Ack!* ”

“Fuck you! Do you have a death wish!? Can’t you run straight!?”

“I am your Sahyung, you jerk!”

“*Ah*, I forgot for a second there.”

Chung Myung scratched his head and grinned as he looked at Sama Seung.

“That must be what you heard. So embarrassing.”

“…”

Sama Seung glared at Chung Myung with venom dripping from his gaze.

Sama Seung was not stupid enough to misunderstand who those words were directed at. There was no way he would be deceived by a child and his antics.

“This…”

At that moment, someone gently tugged on Sama Seung's sleeve. At this, he stopped himself from speaking and glanced back.

It was Jin Geum-Ryong.

"Elder, nothing good can come from arguing with a child."

"*Hmm.* "

Sama Seung sighed and nodded.

No matter how angry he was, he was an elder of the Southern Edge Sect. The difference in status was too great for him to speak to a child. If rumors spread that a third-class disciple from Mount Hua and an elder from the Southern Edge Sect engaged in an argument, it would disgrace his name.

Jin Geum-Ryong stepped forward.

"Who is this young disciple?"

"Who am I? Would you even know if I told you?"

"…"

Jin Geum-Ryong looked at Chung Myung with blank eyes.

He had never before met anyone who answered him with a question like this. Feeling beyond upset, he calmed himself and smiled.

"Perhaps I might know you? So, why don't you tell me?"

"Well, it isn't difficult. I am Chung Myung."

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“Chung Myung?”

Jin Geum-Ryong’s smiling face immediately went stiff.

It was a familiar name.

Wasn’t Chung Myung the name of the Mount Hua disciple that humiliated the Southern Edge Sect?

Jin Geum-Ryong narrowed his eyes and looked at Chung Myung.

‘He’s younger than I thought.’

He thought it was absurd.

Thanks to Chung Myung curing Elder Hwang, the Eunha Guild severed their relationship with the Southern Edge Sect and began supporting Mount Hua.

It was such an embarrassment that the Southern Edge Sect refused to discuss the matter, even more so because Mount Hua was at its center.

Thanks to that, the elders and the sect leader were furious. But the one that caused such shame to fall upon the sect was this young child?

“I see. Disciple Chung Myung. But it seems like disciple Chung Myung never learned proper manners.”

Although it was an outright rebuke at his attitude, Chung Myung picked his ears and whistled.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t hear you very well. Could you come closer and speak up a bit?”

“…what did you say?”

“Are you deaf? Come closer and talk to me. Can’t you hear?”

Jin Geum-Ryong’s face hardened.

‘Just what the hell does this kid believe in?’

If what Lee Song-Baek said was true, this child was knocked back after one strike.

This child had little training in martial arts. What did he believe in that gave him the confidence to speak such nonsense?

Unless he was someone with no sense.

It made Jim Geum-Ryong want to pull out his sword and cut down the arrogant child right in front of him.

However, this was Mount Hua and not the Southern Edge sect. He couldn’t act carelessly here. This wasn’t Jin Geum-Ryong’s role to play.

Gnashing his teeth, he tried to speak softly.

“Aren’t you a third-class disciple of Mount Hua?”

“That’s right.”

“Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect have shared weal and woe in the past. Since that’s the case, and since I am the senior, shouldn’t you be the one to come closer to speak? Of course, as long as you have the slightest sense of manners.”

“*Ah*, really?”

Chung Myung chuckled.

“Then, why didn’t you say that to your elder earlier? If you think that it’s more polite for me to come closer to sasuk, then shouldn’t the elder of the Southern Edge Sect be the one going to visit our sect leader?”

‘Ah, shit.’

Aghast, Jin Geum-Ryong hastily fell silent.

He was trying to scold Chung Myung, but this child used it as an opening to point out Sama Seung’s rudeness.

‘I ended up making a mistake.’

No, it wasn’t a mistake.

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This small child led the flow of conversation like that. Letting Jin Geum-Ryong stumble onto his mistake and admit his elder’s fault.

“This…”

At that time, Sama Seung, who was watching the situation, opened his mouth.

“This young man’s mouth doesn’t seem ordinary.”

“Elder.”

“Move.”

Jin Geum-Ryong, who bit his lip, stared at Chung Myung and then moved back without another word.

Sama Seung smiled.

“Since your actions came from your pure-hearted desire to protect your sect leader’s dignity, I won’t hold you accountable this time.”

“Yes, thank you.”

“But you had best remember one thing. Your rudeness and mine aren’t the same. Do you know why?”

“…Well?”

“Because of power.”

Sama Seung spoke in a low voice.

“It is only when one’s actions are pointed out that impoliteness is considered rude. If no one is willing to point it out, it is simply a passing remark. The right to point out such impoliteness comes from power. Your actions are rude because of your weakness, but my impoliteness cannot be considered rude because of my power.”

Chung Myung frowned.

“I think you should learn to speak more kindly before worrying about being polite.”

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“…what a crazy one.”

Sama Seung turned away from Chung Myung and looked at Hyun Sang.

“I apologize for the disrespect earlier.”

“*Ah*, no. Elder, why are you like this?”

“Now that the child pointed out what I did, wasn’t I being rude? I need to apologize.”

Hyun Sang wasn’t sure what to do.

It was a strange situation where the person who committed the mistake apologized, yet the person receiving the apology was the one that felt more uncomfortable.

Sama Seung smiled and looked back at Chung Myung before speaking.

“Courage is easy to forgive when you’re young. However, one day, your actions may cause you to lose your head. Remember my words.”

With that, Sama Seung turned around.

“Let’s go.”

“Yes, elder.”

Guided by Hyun Sang, he led the disciples and began walking again.

Meanwhile, Lee Seong-Baek bowed his head to Chung Myung.

When Chung Myung returned his greeting with a slight nod, he smiled faintly and walked ahead.

As the Southern Edge Sect disciples moved away, Jo Gul spoke with a pale face.

“Have you lost it? What the hell are you trying to do?”

“What?”

“That person is an elder of the Southern Edge Sect! Elder! Southern Edge Sect!”

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“*Yah!* ”

Chung Myung kicked Jo Gul in the shin again. He struck the same place as before, and Jo Gul agonizingly clutched his leg as he rolled along the floor.

“*Ack!* ”

“Are you a disciple of Mount Hua? Didn’t you hear the bullshit he was spouting towards the sect leader? You think we should hold back?”

“Do you think we’re enduring because we want to?”

Yoon Jong stepped forward with a stiff face.

“Of course, we’re angry, but his words are right. A man without power has no right to point out the flaws of someone who does have strength.”

“Who said we lacked power?”

“… *Huh?* ”

Chung Myung turned his head and looked at the disciples of the Southern Edge Sect, who were walking away.

‘Those bastards, how dare they.’

It was annoying that those thieves were brazen enough to walk into Mount Hua on their own feet, but they even dared to insult the sect

leader.

Even though Chung Myung believes that the current sect leader of Mount Hua lacks the qualifications of a real sect leader, Hyun Jong is still Mount Hua's representative.

So, Chung Myung must protect his dignity from others.

For those idiots to insult the sect leader of Mount Hua…

Chung Myung's eyes began to blaze in a fury.

"I tried to be good to them. But those bastards, even in a new life, want to start fights with me."

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"…No, let's calm down…"

"Chung Myung. Please, I beg of you. Let's think first and then act. *Huh?* "

The third-class disciples panicked when they saw the look in Chung Myung's eyes.

They all knew they would be unable to do anything if Chung Myung got angry.

At that moment, Chung Myung shook his head.

"Did all the Sahyungs get a good look?"

"…what?"

"What those bastards are doing. Even if they ignore Mount Hua, there Is a limit to it.

Are Sahyungs going to endure everything they say?”

“…no, we don’t want to tolerate it either. But how do you…”

“Listen well, Sahyungs.”

Chung Myung spoke with eyes that didn’t stop blazing.

“If you lose to those bastards, you will lose everything.”

“…”

The faces of Yoon Jong and all the third-class disciples went pale.

Chung Myung’s eyes were spitting flames.

“You can lose to anyone else. It doesn’t matter where you go or who beats you up.

Only those Southern Edge Sect bastards, they are the only ones that you can never lose to. Even if you have to die. Anyone who makes me see such a shameful sight had better be prepared. There will come a day where the one who makes others shed tears of blood will shed tears of blood themselves!”

‘What you’re saying doesn’t fit the situation, you brat!’

‘It is the other way around for us!’

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‘You’re the one making us cry bloody tears!’

“Why aren’t you answering?”

Chung Myung asked with eyes sparkling in madness. Just the sight made a chill run down their spine.

“N-No. We want to do that too. But we…”

“What? We what?”

Chung Myung approached the third-class disciples with a frightful glare.

“Are you not confident that you can win?”

“R-rather than that…”

“Are you confident enough to die?”

“…”

“Let me see a single loss. Just one. That’s fine, right. Let’s all die together. You die, and I die too.”

“…”

The Mount Hua and Southern Edge Sect conference.

An event that was held to deepen the friendship between Mount Hua and Southern Edge.

However, now it seems like blood would be spilled because of one person’s anger.

“That little boy…”

Jong Seo-Han glanced back. Jin Geum-Ryong approached him and quietly asked.

“Are you concerned about him?”

Jong Seo-Han whispered, making sure that no one else heard him.

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“Rather than being concerned, it feels ridiculous. I don’t know where such a kid came from.”

“Leave it alone.”

Jin Geum-Ryong spoke in a stiff voice.

“It is the privilege of the weak to go wild and crazy without knowing the truth. Only a foal who doesn’t know how high the sky is would act so recklessly.”

“That is true, but…”

“I have no remorse; he acted arrogantly on his own will. Since we’ve come here for the conference, there will be plenty of opportunities for us to punish him in the future.”

“I’d love to see if he can still talk like that once I tear off his mouth.”

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled brightly.

“That isn’t something a virtuous disciple should say.”

“He was the one who started this fight.”

“True.”

To be precise, the Southern Edge sect started this fight, but Jin Geum-Ryong didn’t bother pointing that out.

“Don’t worry about useless things.”

Sama Seung, who was ahead, spoke in a low voice at that time.

“In the end, a warrior will always speak with his sword. No matter how sharp his tongue may be, nothing will change.”

“Yes, elder.”

“Strength isn’t everything. But this is a place where nothing can be done without power. You all shouldn’t forget that fact.”

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“I’ll keep that in mind.”

Sama Seung narrowed his eyes.

“This time the conference will be interesting. Seeing them behave so arrogantly, they must have something to believe in. We must be sure to thoroughly trample their beliefs and quash their hope. Do you understand?”

“Yes! Elder!”

Sama Seung nodded his head with a smile.

‘A very interesting one.’

Still, it was somewhat commendable. Even the elders of Mount Hua were fearful about speaking against the Southern Edge Sect, but that young man stepped forward fearlessly…

Sama Seung stopped and looked back.

The disciples who were following him were startled and halted in place.

“Elder?”

“What’s wrong?”

Sama Seung, who was staring back with a fear-inducing gaze, soon calmed his expression.

“No, nothing. It was nothing.”

The elder then turned around while gently waving his hand.

Yet, his face hardened again.

Chung Myung clearly pointed out Sama Seung’s fault. That meant… he’d heard how rude he was to Mount Hua’s sect leader?

‘Then… he heard what I said at the gate from that distance?’

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It was such a great distance that Sama Seung hadn’t even known about Chung Myung’s existence.

‘No, that can’t be right.’

He must be mistaken.

‘I must have been nervous. To think such absurd thoughts.’

With a low smile, Sama Seung hurried along.

However, his steps were a little heavier than before.

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Sama Seung sat across from Mount Hua's sect leader, Hyun Jong, and carefully observed him.

'Hyun Jong.'

Hyun Jong was the one who somehow managed to hold together the crumbling fragments of Mount Hua and prevent a total collapse of the sect. The sect leader of the Southern Edge Sect had evaluated Hyun Jong as a man who would have excelled in his position if only the circumstances hadn't been so disastrous.

'It's an over-evaluation.'

Hyun Jong had never once shown excellence befitting his title. Anyone willing to sacrifice themselves for their responsibilities would receive a good evaluation.

'However, a person's greatness isn't judged by their character, but by their achievements.'

Sama Seung turned his head and looked around.

To the left and right of Hyun Jong, there were the martial arts head and the finance heads. The Un disciples, including Un Am and Un Geom, were also seated here.

All of Mount Hua's major figures gathered to welcome him. This wasn't the first time he had seen this…

'Definitely.'

It felt a little different than before.

At the previous conference, everyone he had seen looked tired of their lives and

depressed.

But now, it felt like there was no pressure binding them, and a subtle relaxation was felt around them.

‘I don’t like this.’

Sama Seung narrowed his eyes.

It didn’t matter what the source of their confidence was. Whether it was money or martial arts, it would just be groundless bravado. There was no way for Mount Hua to do anything except fall.

Sama Seung was dissatisfied with the confident atmosphere the elders of Mount Hua exuded.

“I’m not sure if you’ll enjoy the tea.”

When Hyun Jong spoke, Sama Seung lightly nodded his head.

“It has a deep fragrance.”

“I am glad you like it.”

Sama Seung smiled.

“It indeed has a deep fragrance, but I don’t enjoy the scent of plum blossoms.”

Hyun Jong’s eyes widened a little. However, he soon regained his composure and spoke in a soft tone.

“Is there a reason?”

“There are many scents in the forest. The scent of soil, trees, and even the dew on the leaves. But when the plum blossoms are in full bloom, their scent is the only one around. It is so thick that it obscures everything around them.”

Just like Mount Hua in the past.

“The world is a place where we exist together to live in harmony. That is why I prefer

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the subtle scent of green tea over the plum blossom, which breaks down that harmony.”

Sama Seung spoke calmly, but the Un disciples couldn’t hide their flushed faces. This was no different from openly talking back to the sect leader and criticizing the difference in authority.

However, the Hyun elders took Sama Seung’s words differently.

‘Does he mean that back when Mount Hua had dominance, we refused to live harmoniously with others?’

Bringing this subject up at such a moment must mean that the Southern Edge Sect still hasn’t forgotten their past grudges.

This wasn’t something the elder would dare to say in front of any other sect’s elders.

However, no one pointed out Sama Seung’s actions.

As Sama Seung said, respect depends on the one who has power. The moment one becomes unable to punish disrespect and

rudeness, their authority slips into an illusion.

With only a few words, Sama Seung managed to create the atmosphere he wanted and spoke with a smile.

“Sect leader.”

“Speak.”

“We in the Southern Edge Sect have no intention of continuing this tradition and holding any more conferences after this one.”

Hyun Jong frowned.

“Can I know the reason?”

“Simple.”

Sama Seung smiled and spoke.

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“It is because the exchange with Mount Hua doesn’t help the Southern Edge Sect develop in any way. Isn’t the gap between us already too wide to bridge?”

Hyun Jong closed his eyes.

It was such a disgrace to hear this and to see that smug look on his face. Even elders sitting beside him struggled to contain their anger.

‘This bastard… ’

Hyun Young’s beard trembled.

This was intentional. How could someone say such a thing in front of their Sect Leader?

Hyun Jong slowly opened his eyes.

“The conference isn’t just a ceremony to help with development. In the first place, this was done to help foster friendship between our two sects and grow closer—”

“Isn’t that just a façade?”

Sama Seung cut off Hyun Jong’s words.

“This…”

Hyun Young was boiling past the point of no return when Hyun Sang pressed his knee down, begging him not to act out of line.

Hyun Young looked at Hyun Sang and then at Hyun Jong as he bit his lower lip.

‘Isn’t he overdoing this?’

Who didn’t know that the two sects were as incompatible as oil and water? Even Mount Hua was keenly aware of that fact.

Mount Hua is a sect that boasts its history and tradition. Although it’s no longer there, Mount Hua’s name proudly stood alongside the Nine Great Sects and had aimed to be the greatest of them all.

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Even if it wasn’t Mount Hua, but some lesser sect instead, it was impolite to behave like this to their face. Sama Seung couldn’t be ignorant of what a wicked deed he was committing.

Sama Seung glanced at Hyun Young and smiled.

Despite understanding the deeper meaning behind that smirk, Hyun Young couldn't do anything but tighten his grip and endure.

Martial arts sects are ruthless.

Those who lack strength have no choice but to endure humiliation from the powerful.

After glancing at each of the people gathered in the room, Sama Seung continued.

"The Southern Edge Sect and Mount Hua have never had a good relationship. To be honest, wouldn't it be more accurate to say that we are closer to being enemies? I'm sure that those in this room likely want to eat me alive and chew me down to the bone."

"…It's not that bad."

"Then, is there anyone here who has good feelings towards me? No, does anyone have any good feelings towards the Southern Edge Sect itself?"

No one answered.

It wasn't difficult to answer 'yes,' but why should they lie? They knew the truth, and so did Sama Seung.

"There is nothing more futile than trying to reconnect a thread which is already severed."

Sama Seung's voice was firm.

As if everything had been decided, and this was just a notice.

When an elder speaks with such confidence, it usually means that the decision has already been settled, and they're simply relaying

the message. So, this wasn't just

Sama Seung's will, but that of the entire Southern Edge Sect.

Furthermore, the Southern Edge Sect was officially saying that they would stand atop Mount Hua and put them under their feet.

A declaration that they would no longer regard Mount Hua as competition in the future.

It was disgraceful.

Completely humiliating.

And when no one dared to speak, Un Am spoke up.

"Isn't this a bit too sudden?"

"It should have been done already."

"Elder."

Seeing that Un Am didn't back down, Sama Seung glanced at him as if looking down on him.

"Then, do you think Mount Hua has the qualifications to compete with the Southern Edge Sect?"

Un Am went silent. He couldn't answer that.

With a smile, Sama Seung continued.

"I think the Southern Edge Sect has done everything we could to treat Mount Hua with utmost kindness until now."

“Utmost kindness? You are acting too much!”

As Un Am raised his voice, Sama Seung laughed.

“What is too much?”

“…”

“The Southern Edge Sect has forgotten the grudges of the past and helped Mount Hua till now. In fact, isn’t it unfair for us to continue like this with Mount Hua? The conference has always been held in Mount Hua, and we’ve even provided a certain degree of wealth whenever we travel here for the event. Yet, despite our kindness, you still choose to blame us?”

This wasn’t right.

Un Am ground his teeth.

The reason why the conference was held in Mount Hua was obvious.

Southern Edge did it to come and ridicule the crumbling Mount Hua and to show off their own martial arts.

The wealth they provided as ‘support’ to Mount Hua was just a pretense of keeping the sect from refusing to hold the conference.

“Sect leader.”

Sama Seung spoke resolutely.

“It might be hard to understand but allow me to simplify it. Once you see the results of this conference, you will be the first to ask that this

never happens to Mount Hua again. Think carefully about this if you don't want to ruin the children."

Sama Seung got up from his seat. Then left the room without letting his mood be affected by the change of atmosphere.

While everyone else was too shocked and didn't know what to do, Hyun Jong asked a question.

"Is this path the final one which the Southern Edge Sect has chosen?"

Sama Seung stopped walking and slowly turned his head to look back. Hyun Jong's expressionless face left Sama Seung unable to discern the intentions behind his question.

"That isn't up to me to decide."

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With that, the foreign elder opened the door and left the room.

Anguish filled the faces of those who were left behind.

"How can they say such a thing!?"

Hyun Young couldn't hold back his anger and slammed the table. Cracks appeared on the table.

But no one thought of blaming him.

Un Geom opened his mouth with a heavy feeling.

"Every time the conference is held, they've always been aggressive, but this is the first time they've acted so viciously."

“That’s right. This is over the line!”

“How can a mere elder speak like that to the sect leader!?”

“Isn’t the Southern Edge Sect supposed to come and relay this directly?”

No one could hold back their anger and continued adding to each other’s grievances.

Among them, only Hyun Jong quietly shook his head with a sad face.

“…leave it alone.”

“But sect leader!”

“Words are sometimes spoken in vain. Would our words have any meaning now?”

Un Am bowed his head. The others also bowed, their faces shifting between expressions of anguish and fury.

Hyun Jong said.

“I can tolerate any amount of disgrace. Even if they spit in my face, I can smile back at them. That isn’t what I’m worried about right now.”

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“…then?”

“I’m worried about the children.”

“*Ah*…”

Un Am’s eyes trembled.

“Looking at how he said it directly, surely, the conference will be extremely daunting this time. I can endure the insults they cast on me, but what should I do if our children are going to suffer too?”

Hyun Jong’s face turned bitter. As a sect leader of a weak sect, the burden he had to endure was too heavy.

“Then, even now…”

Un Am kept his mouth shut.

He wanted to say ‘Then we should stop the conference now!’, but before he could even finish speaking, he realized what situation they were in.

It was a disgrace worse than death for those learning martial arts to give up in fear of an opponent.

Moreover, the children can understand the situation well enough. If they are asked to surrender without a proper match, this will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

“My sins are too great.”

Hyun Jong sighed deeply. Nobody could find any words to comfort him, and so everyone decided to remain silent.

Un Geom, who was quietly listening to the conversation, spoke up at that moment.

“Sect leader. There is no need to think like that.”

Hyun Jong’s eyes turned to Un Geom.

“They want to show a clear gap between Mount Hua and themselves in order to

spread the news that we're no longer worthy of being a prestigious sect within Shaanxi. It would be a decisive blow for our sect, which has already fallen so far from our peak. Isn't that what they're aiming for?

"True, but we've run out of tricks up our sleeve."

"We don't need any tricks. Wouldn't it be enough as long as we don't let them win so easily?"

"…"

"Sect leader."

Seeing Hyun Jong at a loss of words, Un Geom slightly smiled as he spoke.

"Trust the children. Maybe we'll receive some good news."

"…"

Un Geom smiled as he received everyone's gazes filled with suspicion.

'Now it's your turn to prove yourself. Chung Myung.'

Inside the Blue Plum Dorms, where the guests were housed, a strange atmosphere had settled.

Sitting in the center chair, Jin Geum-Ryong narrowed his eyes and mumbled.

“I don’t like this.”

He had just finished his meal.

A well-organized housing with mouth-watering food was the perfect way to fill the weary hearts and empty stomachs of those who had just climbed the mountain.

But that very fact was off-putting to Jin Geum-Ryong.

“Did they find a vein of gold somewhere?”

Mount Hua had to be inferior to the Southern Edge Sect in every aspect.

He knew that there was no comparison between Mount Hua and Southern Edge’s wealth. Nevertheless, seeing that the gap had narrowed left Jin Geum-Ryong displeased.

Jong Seo-Han glanced at him and smiled awkwardly.

Jin Geum-Ryong was normally a very gentle person. However, if one judged his true character to be gentle, they would be fooled.

The Jin Geum-Ryong that Jong Seo-Han knew was like the sea.

The sea calmly embraces everyone, but it turns to a wild maelstrom that swallows everything when angered. Jin Geum-Ryong was precisely like that. He was usually

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gentle, but he would become genuinely terrifying when angry.

Jong Seo-Han smiled awkwardly and said,

“It seems like Mount Hua has a bit of money now. Great Sahyung.”

“*Hmm.* ”

“But in the end, aren’t martial arts the most important thing? Even if they dress in fancy silk and eat luxurious meals, it doesn’t mean anything if they lack the martial might to support themselves.”

“That is true.”

Jin Geum-Ryong slowly got up.

And looked at the sahyungs there.

“But!”

He spoke in a voice loud enough for all to hear.

“All I want is a complete victory!”

Everyone held their breath.

“Fame, wealth, martial arts, a complete victory where we exceed them in all facets.

Otherwise, there is no meaning. If there is an opening left for Mount Hua to be compared to us, then it is a disgrace to the Southern Edge Sect. Did you forget? Our generation must make our sect into the greatest!”

A powerful determination shone in the eyes of the second-class disciples.

“Keep yourselves controlled. The way you all relax as if you’re here on a refreshing holiday makes me sick. Don’t forget what our purpose here is. Those who fail to live up to the Southern Edge Sect’s standards will never be forgiven!”

“We will keep that in mind. Sahyung!”

“We will never let our guards down.”

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Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap!

Then, the door opened wide.

Clapping his hands, Sama Seung entered the residence.

“Excellent.”

“Elder!”

Sama Seung nodded with a smile as everyone got up to greet him.

“Jin Geum-Ryong’s words are exactly right.”

“I feel embarrassed. If I had known that elder was coming, I would have never said it.”

“No. No. It was an absolutely wonderful statement. The disciples of the Southern Edge Sect need to have such heart.”

Sama Seung lowered his hand and smiled.

“In addition to that.”

“Yes, elder.”

“This time, the conference shouldn’t just end with victory. We must defeat them so thoroughly that they would never dare to speak the Southern Edge Sect’s name again. Do you understand what I mean?”

Jin Geum-Ryong narrowed his eyes.

“What does that mean?”

“Your sparring will compare both sect’s martial arts. It’s common sense to be careful not to harm each other. Isn’t that right?”

Sinking into thought, Jin Geum-Ryong smiled.

“Elder.”

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“Yes?”

“Mount Hua’s disciples seem to be quite sharp. It appears that they aren’t what they used to be.”

“*Hm?* ”

Sama Seung’s expression hardened when he heard Jin Geum-Ryong’s suddenly weak tone. However, he relaxed as he listened to the following words that flowed from Jin Geum-Ryong.

“It’s a basic principle to avoid harm while sparring with one another. However, they do seem to be more skilled than expected. So, there is a limit to how much we can hold back. If we want to avoid getting injured ourselves, we may need to break an arm or leg. Is that alright?”

Sama Seung put his hand on his chin, trying to maintain his troubled facade.

“No, that would be unacceptable. No matter how important the spar is, it will mean nothing if our children get hurt. Everyone, you should focus on finishing this conference without getting injured as much as possible. Even…”

Sama Seung smiled and continued.

“Even if it means injuring your opponent instead.”

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled and nodded.

“I will take good care of the sajaes and finish this conference without any accidents.”

“*Hm.* Good.”

Sama Seung smiled and looked at Jin Geum-Ryong.

He wouldn’t need to worry about the conference with a child like this anymore. In the future, when Jin Geum-Ryong becomes the sect leader, he is sure to take the Southern Edge Sect to unprecedented heights.

Of course, he was doing a good enough job now.

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“Geum-Ryong.”

“Yes, Elder.”

“I will not leave too many tasks to you. But I want to ask you one thing.”

“Say it, elder.”

“Don’t leave that cheeky bastard alone.”

“…”

A person’s face flitted through Jin Geum-Ryong’s mind. Perhaps, the others were also thinking the same thing. After all, only one person in Mount Hua was cheeky and arrogant.

“Are you talking about that child, Chung Myung?”

“Yes.”

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled brightly.

“Don’t worry, elder. I will make sure to break him of his attitude.”

“You are short-sighted.”

“…Yes?”

Thinking that he had said something wrong, Jin Geum-Ryong immediately bowed his head.

“That child has already done a great job by connecting the Eunha Guild and Mount Hua. I’m sure everyone is aware of that.”

“Yes.”

When everyone answered vigorously, Lee Song-Baek just quietly bowed his head.

Lee Song-Baek couldn’t help but feel horrible whenever Eunha was mentioned.

After giving him a brief glance, Sama Seung continued.

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“From my point of view, it seems that Mount Hua trusts that child a lot. Yet, he has that kind of personality. Do you understand what I mean?”

“I am a foolish disciple; it is hard for me to understand.”

“The world is a place where people with true abilities will rise and overcome any obstacles. Sometimes though, it is a place where people without any unique abilities gain momentum and make ridiculous achievements. It may be detrimental for the future of the Southern Edge Sect if that child is allowed to grow up like this.”

Jin Geum-Ryong narrowed his eyes.

‘This?’

“It might be too extreme, but isn’t he still just a child now?”

“Yes.”

“…”

With a hoarse voice, Sama Seung continued.

“Now, that child who barely made a name for himself managed to say everything he wanted against me. What will happen when that child fully matures?”

“… *Hmm*.”

“It will be one or the other. Exceptional growth or complete ruination.”

“Isn’t he more likely to be ruined?”

“I can’t accept that the possibility exists for that child to grow and develop in Mount Hua. That’s why we need to nip this problem in the bud.”

“I understand what Elder is saying.”

Jin Geum-Ryong turned his head.

“Woo-Ryang!”

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“Yes, sasuk!”

Seon Woo-Ryang rushed forward from the back.

“Did you hear what the elder said?”

“Yes, Sasuk. Don’t worry. I will thoroughly destroy his arrogant mouth so that he never mocks anyone again.”

“That won’t be enough. Make certain that he can never return to his past self.

Entrench the fear of the Southern Edge Sect into his bones and make him regret this for the rest of his life.”

“Yes! Sasuk!”

Jin Geum-Ryong nodded.

Seon Woo-Ryang was the most capable of the third-class disciples. Although he was not the oldest, he had the greatest skills.

His skills began to grow and stand out more prominently after the last conference had already ended. Mount Hua would not even

believe this child was the same as back then.

He would be the best disciple to handle Chung Myung.

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled brightly and turned to Sama Seung.

“Everything will be as you wish. I will make sure of that.”

Sama Seung nodded his head with a satisfied expression.

“I believe you.”

More than one could know.

These were the children of the Southern Edge Sect that he raised with all his heart and soul. He held no doubts that all his efforts would help these disciples’ skills explode and usher in a new heyday for the sect.

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And this conference would serve as an opportunity to announce that to the world.

‘I will trample on them.’

An eerie chill rose in Sama Seung’s eyes.

“…Are you really doing this?”

“My heart is pounding so hard, I might die.”

“I went to the bathroom twelve times today.”

“*Ah,* disgusting.”

The third-class disciples couldn’t sleep until late at night.

Tomorrow, the day would finally come.

Until now, there was no time to think about the conference; they were so focused on their training that even breathing was difficult.

However, after taking a day off from training to preserve stamina, random thoughts dominated their minds.

“Can we really do well?”

“Didn’t Chung Myung say that we could?”

“No, he’s never seen those Southern Edge boys, though.”

“True, but…”

Yoon Jong sighed.

He knew the sajaes were anxious about tomorrow, but he couldn’t find any words to calm them.

‘Because I am going crazy too.’

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His heart was pounding.

When he turned his head and glanced to the side, even Jo Gul seemed nervous. So, no one could sleep in the late hours before dawn, and they all gathered here.

Yoon Jong scratched his head and asked.

“Chung Myung?”

“Sleeping.”

“…his guts must be made out of iron.”

Does he not understand nervousness? Or was he also tense?

Tomorrow was the conference. No, it is technically today since midnight had already passed.

Just the thought was making their hearts pound erratically.

“He’s been sleeping for a while.”

“I saw him stretched out like a dead man. He even snores!”

“…I’m envious of him; I am going crazy here.”

As Yoon Jong opened his mouth, a muffled voice came.

“It’s not that I have guts of iron, but your guts are tiny like peas.”

Everyone’s heads shifted toward the stairs in unison.

Chung Mung came down with a sullen face.

“What are you doing? You haven’t slept at all and gathered here?”

“B-because I’m nervous.”

“Nervous?”

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Chung Myung tilted his head.

‘He’s back at it again! That bastard!’

‘How is he going to bully us this time?’

‘What? Again!? Will he tell us that he’ll kill us if we lose to them? That evil bastard!”

However, Chung Myung’s following words deviated slightly from their expectations.

“Why are you so nervous?”

“… *Huh?* ”

“Isn’t nervousness reserved for those people who are unprepared?”

Yoon Jong responded.

“No, it isn’t like that. We’re just afraid that we might not be able to show a good performance tomorrow…”

“Sahyung.”

“*Huh?* ”

“Then, is there anything Sahyung could do to improve if we turned back time and had ten more days?”

“…”

None. No, just the thought of ten more days could make him sick. Yoon Jong couldn’t imagine suffering through that crazy training for ten more days.

“There’s no such thing as nervousness for those who did everything they could.

Sahyungs aren’t nervous right now. You just don’t believe in yourselves. But it’s funny, if you are weak, then admit that you’re

weak. What's really important is whether or not you did your best to prepare. Sahyung, did you give your best effort?"

"…yes."

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It was something they could say with certainty. The disciples all did their best.

"Then, that's enough."

Chung Myung snapped his finger.

"No matter what anyone says, I will admit that you have all done your best. So, don't waste your time on useless thoughts and go to sleep. Getting enough sleep the night before a battle is also a skill to keep you in shape."

Everyone nodded.

"Then, go on."

"…Where are you going?"

"I need to train."

"But today is the conference."

"That's nice. However, my training is about ten times more important than that."

With those final words, Chung Myung walked out the door.

And the third-class disciples all let out a sigh.

“Seriously…”

“Heading to practice.”

Seeing Chung Myung maintain his normal schedule, even on the day of the conference, everyone present felt like the worries they had seemed meaningless.

“Okay, let’s get some sleep.”

Yoon Jong spoke lowly.

“Chung Myung is right. If we want to confidently answer that we’ve given our best efforts, we’ll need to sleep to get into perfect form.”

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“Yes, Sahyung.”

Everyone seemed to be in the same mood and got up together.

Yoon Jong, who was watching the others head to their rooms one after the other, looked at the door where Chung Myung had left.

‘He’s such a strange guy.’

With just a few words, he managed to ease everyone’s worries. The disciples that feared they’d get no sleep until dawn suddenly began to feel relaxed and drowsy.

Whatever the conference’s outcome, the third-class disciples have become stronger thanks to Chung Myung’s strange influence.

Yoon Jong was sure of that.

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Chung Myung looked around as he climbed up the mountain.

‘She isn’t here, right?’

Chung Myung, who was quite nervous that Yu Yiseol would catch up with him, sighed deeply.

“*Sigh*… what am I doing?”

Chung Myung had nothing in this world he feared. In the past, when he was the Plum Blossom Sword Saint, there were people afraid of him, but he was never afraid of others.

Wasn’t the sect leader of the Shaolin sect even reluctant to meet him?

But now, that same Chung Myung was in a situation where he avoided a little girl.

“What am I being made to deal with?”

It would be so much simpler if he could just hit her on the head, wrap her up with a rope, and toss her off a cliff somewhere. But since she’s just an innocent nuisance, he can’t beat her up, right?

Huh?

What about Baek Cheon?

“That bastard came at me first.”

There’s a difference between a senior who picks a fight and a senior that’s a nuisance.

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Well, for the first time in this life… no, for the first time ever, Chung Myung was avoiding others.

“What’s become of me!? Why do I need to avoid people this early in the morning!?”

Chung Myung, who stopped to take a deep breath, was ready to run up again.

‘ *Oh?* ’

He felt something.

“*Yah! Yah!* I knew this was going to happen! It’s useless to try fooling an old ghost like me! You can’t deceive… *huh*?”

Chung Myung titled his head.

This qi he was feeling was different from Yu Yiseol’s.

Yu Yiseol boasts a weird sense of non-existence; it was something that Chung Myung would have to heavily concentrate on feeling.

So, Chung Myung would listen for her footsteps instead.

However, what he was feeling now was too strong and clear to be Yu Yiseol. And…

“Two people?”

Not just one.

Chung Myung's eyes narrowed, and he moved cautiously as he sensed the qi.

For two people to be meeting in this deep mountain so early in the morning. It felt like a conspiracy.

'I need to see what they're up to.'

Chung Myung's eyes began to sparkle.

Swoosh!

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His feet began to swiftly cut through the wind and accelerate. Chung Myung quickly halted and melded into his surroundings as he approached the area that he felt the qi coming from.

And then, he carefully snuck forward and stuck his head out to have a peek.

' *Huh?* '

Chung Myung blinked his eyes. No matter how much he tried to double-check if his senses were right, the sight in front of him didn't change.

One of the two figures was someone Chung Myung knew.

Baek Cheon.

It wasn't strange for Baek Cheon to be here; after all, this was still Mount Hua's territory.

But the other person standing there was unexpected, he wasn't from Mount Hua, and the situation seemed strange.

‘Why is he here?’

Jin Geum-Ryong.

Jin Geum-Ryong, one of the Southern Edge Sect’s greatest disciples, stood opposite Baek Cheon with an odd expression.

‘Why are the two of them meeting here?’

It was definitely a conspiracy.

Chung Myung cautiously moved closer to listen in.

“You seem to be doing well.”

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled brightly and spoke to Baek Cheon. But Baek Cheon’s face clearly expressed his displeasure.

“You seem to be at ease.”

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“Isn’t there a reason for that, Dong-Ryong?”

“*Pffft!* ”

Jin Geum-Ryong and Baek Cheon both turned their gazes toward the sudden sound.

‘ *Ah*, shit!’

Chung Myung desperately held his breath and concealed himself.

It was almost unbearable for Chung Myung to restrain his laughter when he heard the word Dong-Ryong. (Bronze Dragon)

The two looked at each other again. They probably thought it was just a passing beast.

Baek Cheon's face contorted.

"Don't call me by that name. I am Baek Cheon."

"Don't think of throwing away the name your parents gave you. No matter what anyone says, you are Jin Dong-Ryong."

' *Ugh*. Please, just stop already.'

Chung Myung clutched the floor and tried not to laugh.

'Oh shit. I might die. Dong-Ryong. Baek Cheon's real name is Dong-Ryong! *Ah*, my stomach might rip at this rate!'

Chung Myung's body trembled and was cramped as he fought to hold back his laughter.

Baek Cheon's face quickly turned red as if it would burst.

"It's Baek Cheon!"

"Fine, Dong-Ryong."

'Wow, he is really losing it.'

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Baek Cheon hated it so much that his face was burning red, but the other guy just kept calling him Dong-Ryong.

'Such a bad personality.'

Whether or not he knew about Chung Myung's internal evaluation of him, Jin Geum-Ryong continued to speak with a smile.

"Isn't Mount Hua a great place to live? You look pretty good too, don't you think?"

"What are you trying to say?"

"I just wanted to see you."

A smile grew on Jin Geum-Ryong's lips.

"To see what kind of an ugly life that little brother of mine who ran away from home to beat his older brother was living in Mount Hua."

"You saw that two years ago, didn't you?"

"I never get tired of kicking a defeated dog; not even a hundred times would be enough."

Baek Cheon's face crumpled.

This was Jin Geum-Ryong's true character. He was merciless to those he considered weaker than himself. He usually disguises himself with a kind face, but he was rotten inside.

How long had Baek Cheon been bullied by him?

"What do you say? If you get on your knees and beg, I can accept you into the Southern Edge Sect."

"Don't spout shit."

Baek Cheon looked straight at Jin Geum-Ryong.

"I am Baek Cheon, the Great Sahyung of Mount Hua's second-class disciples. My

dream is to make Mount Hua into a well-known sect that stands above the Southern Edge Sect. So don't say such words in front of me again."

' *Oh?* '

Chung Myung looked at the two in front of him with shining eyes.

Let's see.

So, these two are brothers, one Geum-Ryong (Golden Dragon) and the other is Dong-Ryong. (Bronze dragon)

'…I really want to meet their father, at least once.'

He needed to meet the enemy that caused his belly such pain. What on earth did he think when he named his children like that!? That's why Baek Cheon ran away!

Baek Cheon spoke with a growl.

"Since I know you're just speaking hollow words, I'll ignore that remark. After all, I know that even if I begged, you would simply mock me and act like it never happened. That's just the kind of person you are."

"*Haha*, being brothers is strange. You know me so well, despite being apart for so long."

Jin Geum-Ryong, who had been smiling until then, suddenly changed his expression and turned cold.

"You made the wrong choice."

"…"

“If you wanted to defeat me, you should have entered the Southern Edge Sect. Maybe then you might have had a chance, but you chose Mount Hua instead of the Southern Edge Sect? You fled to a crippled sect to defeat me? *Hahahaha!* Even a dog would find this funny!”

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

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“Do not look down on Mount Hua.”

“*Oh?* ”

“Yes, you’re right. The reason I joined Mount Hua was that you despised it. I will lead Mount Hua and defeat the older brother who ignored and looked down on me.”

“Such a foolish idea, so stupid that it makes me feel dumb for listening. It’s exactly like you.”

Ignoring the constant flood of spiteful words, Baek Cheon firmly said.

“In the beginning, I certainly was childish. But now, I really like Mount Hua. Living my life as Baek Cheon, Great Sahyung of Mount Hua’s second-class disciples is the most rewarding experience for me.”

‘ *Ohh?* ’

Chung Myung looked at Baek Cheon with a subtle sense of pride emanating from his eyes.

‘So that’s his story?’

He did say that he needed to grow stronger. So, there must have been a reason behind it, right?

Chung Myung felt a bit moved by Baek Cheon's words.

' *Ah*, this is so… '

"You think it's rewarding to live as the disciple of a crumbling sect? In this ruined mountain? Has your mind gone astray?"

'That son of a bitch!'

Hearing what this bastard had to say, Chung Myung grew furious.

'I just need to punch him once!'

"Yes."

Baek Cheon answered firmly.

"It might seem strange, but I understood once I stayed here. I'm not the sort of person who is happy living comfortably in a rich sect with nice food, clothes, and education. At the very least, this place needs me here. I can set a goal and help develop this sect. Mount Hua is a sect that has given me a goal to strive for.

Furthermore, it is a home which embraced me affectionately!"

"Affection?"

Jin Geum-Ryong frowned.

"Such weakness. When I see you talking like that, I understand that you've lost your sense of reality. Let me tell you. You're already finished. As a result of your pathetic choice, you will live the rest of your life in humiliation, forever left behind as a third-rate martial artist. Nothing more than a servant. Meanwhile, you will watch me

rise as the future sect leader of the Southern Edge Sect from your withered hovel.”

“Well, I don’t really care. I am going to live my life regardless.”

“You’re going to live your life like trash. Well, at least it will be fun for me to watch.”

Jin Geum-Ryong said with a sly smile.

“But I’m not one to watch on the side for long. Rather than waste time waiting, I will show you tomorrow. You’ll see just how stupid it was for you to choose Mount Hua instead of the Southern Edge Sect.”

Jin Geum-Ryong tilted his head as if contemplating something before a wretched sneer covered his face.

“No, No. Maybe this was a good choice. After all, there’s no better combination for a ruined sect than an idiot disciple.”

“I don’t mind you insulting me, but your foul mouth has no right to speak of Mount Hua. Watch yourself, or I’ll tear that mouth of yours off.”

“…someone like you?”

Jin Geum-Ryong glared at Baek Cheon as he trembled in anger.

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After staring for a while, Jin Geum-Ryong suddenly smiled.

“There’s no need to rush. The time will come when you realize it. Neither you nor Mount Hua will be able to make their marks on the world after tomorrow. I’ll make certain of that.”

Jin Geum-Ryong glanced once more at Baek Cheon before descending the mountain.

Baek Cheon sighed deeply as he stared at Jin Geum-Ryong's slowly fading figure.

'Can I do it?'

Jin Geum-Ryong is a strong man that always achieves his goals. Aside from his poor attitude, he was still more talented and greater than Baek Cheon.

Baek Cheon bit his lip.

'I shouldn't let myself be shaken.'

He is Baek Cheon of Mount Hua. One day, he would become the sect leader of Mount Hua and lead everyone into glory.

Baek Cheon, who was mumbling to himself, finally steeled his determination and turned around.

"Wow, look at this admirable kid."

"*Ah!* Fuck! You scared me!"

Baek Cheon was so terrified at the sudden words that he fell backward on the floor.

He was so shocked that he thought his heart would burst through his throat.

When he finally settled down, he saw Chung Myung nodding his head with a pleased expression.

"You, you… why are you here?"

"Dong-Ryo… *ahh*, Do-Do, Dong-Ryong."

Baek Cheon's expression crumpled when he heard Chuny Myung's words, while the

culprit himself struggled to hold back his oppressive laughter.

"…you heard everything?"

"Oh my, Dong-Ryong. I was amazed by your wonderful heart, which holds such pride for Mount Hua."

Chung Myung nodded, while Baek Cheon sighed.

"Are you a ghost? I couldn't even feel your presence."

"Well, that is to be expected."

"…I haven't done anything wrong, but don't tell anyone about this. Others might not think of this as a good thing."

"Don't worry, Sasuk. This is Chung Myung! I'm the man with the heaviest mouth in the world."

"…"

Doesn't that mean that his mouth can't hold anything?

Baek Cheon wrapped his head around the idea of being caught.

No one except the sect leader and a few elders knew about this. But of all the people to find out…

"*Hmm*. So, Sasuk is Jin Geum-Ryong's younger brother?"

“Even though we’re brothers, we don’t have a friendly relationship. Our mothers are different…”

Baek Cheon sighed and tried to talk.

“Since I was little—”

“*Ah*, don’t bother.”

“*Huh?* ”

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“I don’t have the time to listen to such trivial drama. It’s obvious. Whether he’s older or younger, you were defeated by your talented sibling and didn’t get treated well, so you ran away from home and came to Mount Hua.”

“…don’t just summarize other people’s lives.”

But it was right.

“You did well.”

“Right. So… what?”

Baek Cheon titled his head.

“I said that you did well. Coming to Mount Hua.”

Chung Myung had a different expression from before. It wasn’t the mischievous smile that scratched a person’s nerves to anger them. Rather, it was simply a gentle smile.

Then, Chung Myung spoke with a heavy voice.

“No matter your origins or what your story is, Sasuk is a disciple of Mount Hua. You weren’t wrong to abandon the Southern Edge Sect and choose Mount Hua; we will prove it.”

Baek Cheon couldn’t say anything.

This didn’t seem like a speech that should come from such a young child. Strangely though, when Baek Cheon listened to Chung Myung’s words, he felt his heart at ease.

“We’ll prove it? When?”

“When?”

Chung Myung chuckled.

“Today.”

And then he turned away.

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Soon the sun would rise, and the conference would begin.

“Let’s run wild, Sasuk.”

He couldn’t hear the other part, but,

Now is the time to crush those bastards!

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The day of the Mount Hua-Southern Edge Sect conference had finally dawned.

Hyun Jong was quietly looking at the second and third-class disciples lined up in front of him.

Seeing the hardened and stiff expressions on the faces of these children, Hyun Jong felt his heart clench. Even the children lined up in front of him understood the weight of their burden at this conference.

Hyun Jong felt as if his heart would break.

He wasn't sure when things had changed, but this burden should originally have been shouldered by the elders and the sect leader. However, at some time after the initiation of this conference, the responsibility of proving the sect's worth and defending its honor passed onto the sect's young disciples.

Hyun Jong believed that even the second-class disciples were too young to carry this duty.

Not to mention the third-class disciples.

Still, he felt infinitely grateful to the children who withheld all complaints and stepped forward despite their worries.

"Sect Leader."

Hyun Young recognized the anxious atmosphere, and Hyun Jong slightly raised his head.

The sect leader had fallen into sentimental thoughts and left the children standing in silence for too long.

Hyun Jong coughed to ease himself out of his emotional thoughts and spoke with a soft voice.

“Everyone seems nervous.”

Hyun Jong looked at the children and shook his head.

“You don’t have to be so stiff. It doesn’t matter whether we win or lose. All you must do is use this as an opportunity to learn and grow.”

Hyun Jong made eye contact with everyone as he spoke with determination.

“No matter what the outcome may be, you are all the proud disciples of Mount Hua.

All you need to do is remember that fact.”

It was crudely spoken.

It was a speech that didn’t rouse their morale or seek to inspire the students to defeat their opponents and bring glory to Mount Hua.

But those words eased the disciples’ tense minds, and their expressions began to soften.

Hyun Jong nodded when he saw that everyone had begun to relax.

“I will keep watching over you. So go.”

With that, Hyun Jong turned and walked away; Hyun Young quickly followed after him.

“You won’t go with them?”

“No matter how difficult this conference may be, there is no need for those who will watch and those who will fight to arrive together. The children must also have things to say between themselves. Let them have their time together.”

“Yes, sect leader.”

Hyun Young signaled to the other elders and Un disciples before they quickly followed Hyun Jong.

As the second-class and third-class disciples sighed, one person stepped forward.

Baek Cheon.

He stood in front of everyone with a determined face.

“Today, we will fight the Southern Edge Sect.”

Baek Cheon’s gaze landed on Chung Myung briefly before returning.

“As the sect leader said, there is no shame in losing. What is shameful is failing to do your best. When we fight, we fight as proud disciples of Mount Hua.”

“Yes! Sahyung!”

“Let’s go!”

With a resolute expression, Baek Cheon led the second-class disciples. A fierce aura of determination emanated from the second-class disciples who followed behind him. Even Yu Yiseol, who was farthest back, showed a much more serious visage than usual.

“*Ahem.* ”

Yoon Jong snuck out to the front as the second-class disciples headed off.

And the third-class disciples warmly welcomed him.

“What, does the Great Sahyung have something to say?”

“No, let’s just do this. Such days scare me.”

“*Haa*. Seriously, I heard fighting turns people crazy.”

‘These bastards… ’

“Look at you bastards, thinking that I can act like Baek Cheon sasuk!”

“I get it. Let’s move already; my legs hurt.”

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“If you’re going to be like this, let’s all say something. Jo Gul Sahyung. Go ahead and stand ahead of us. It will save some time.”

“*Uh*.”

Yoon Jong took a deep breath.

‘They were all such good kids in the past.’

How did things end up like this?

Yoon Jong turned his head and looked at the culprit.

Even though a massive event like the conference was happening, Chung Myung looked like he was dying from boredom.

“Chung Myung.”

“*Huh?* ”

“Do you have anything to say?”

Chung Myung laughed.

“Is there anything worth saying?”

Chung Myung turned his head and spoke calmly.

“Let’s finish this quickly and go eat. Move it.”

Yoon Jong unwittingly smiled at Chung Myung’s casual remark.

“Come, you brat.”

He didn’t know about the others, but he was sure of one thing.

Normally, Chung Myung was a madman. But in times like this, Yoon Jong felt reassured by his presence.

“Let’s go!”

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Yoon Jong took the lead and guided everyone to the conference.

Following him, Chung Myung’s eyes seemed to glimmer.

The Mount Hua–Southern Edge conference is an event created for both sects to exchange techniques and experience the other.

Of course, there is a deeper intent internally since it was a way for the Southern Edge Sect to intervene with Mount Hua's growth and humiliate them. On the surface, however, both sects maintained the appearance that this event was held out of mutual respect.

Therefore, this event never entertained visitors.

Until now, only the members of both sects had gathered together to witness the exchanges.

And this event was no different.

At least, that's what everyone thought before they arrived at the hall.

Whisper.

"…"

Hyun Jong stared with his eyes wide open.

After passing through Mount Hua's gate, one would find the great training hall. Due to the nature of the event, they required a large space. Therefore, the conference was held here without exception.

Until now, all of Mount Hua's and the Southern Edge Sect's disciples would line up on the left and right sides of this wide area. Today, however, a rather strange scene was playing out.

"W-what are they…?"

An unknown crowd had gathered in the training hall, with more people continuing to

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pour in.

What was more bizarre was that they each held some kind of item in their hands.

Every one of them was carrying either chairs or tables.

Hyun Jong was taken aback by the unexpected situation. Un Am quickly approached him with an urgent face.

“Sect Leader.”

“What happened here?”

“A massive swarm of people flocked to the front gate and demanded to see the conference for themselves. There were too many people gathered for us to refuse.”

“*Uhhh*.”

Hyun Jong shook his head.

“Did the Southern Edge Sect call them here?”

If so, the purpose was obvious.

Their goal must be to show how horribly they crush Mount Hua.

He didn’t notice at first, but upon closer inspection, there were many colorfully dressed middle-aged men. Among them were some familiar faces to Hyun Jong; he could tell that many of the people here were Shaanxi’s officials.

Even local celebrities were called, and all around them were people in official uniforms.

Considering their influence, once they witnessed the events here, they would spread the news all over Shaanxi.

‘This is bad!’

Hyun Jong, who felt a bit anxious at that concerning thought, spoke in a lower voice.

“Don’t you know that strangers aren’t allowed inside without permission?”

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“But sect leader.”

“Aren’t their intentions clear?”

“I-it is true, but…”

“*Huh?* ”

A low voice was heard in Hyun Jong’s ears.

“Sect leader, I don’t believe this is something we coordinated before, is it?”

Hyun Jong turned his head.

The Southern Edge Sect elder, Sama Seung, approached them with a slightly embarrassed face.

Hyun Jong paid particular attention to his ‘embarrassed’ expression.

‘Did the Southern Edge Sect really not do this?’

If Sama Seung had gathered everyone here, there was no reason for him to be so bewildered. He would have leisurely walked in with a grin.

Hyun Jong snuck a glance at Un Am.

“What happened?”

“I tried to stop them, but the person who brought them—”

“Is me, Sect Leader.”

Both Hyun Jong and Sama Seung shifted their sights to the new arrival and witnessed a familiar smiling face approach them.

“Elder Hwang?”

“Elder Hwang?”

Hwang Mun-Yak of the Eunha Merchant Guild.

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“It’s quite exhilarating.”

Elder Hwang arrived, and the two representatives greeted him. Still, they each had their own doubts.

With a bright smile, Hwang Mun-Yak said.

“Since the conference is being held, I thought there should be some excitement, so I invited an audience.”

“*Hmm.* ”

Hyung Jong frowned and was about to refute when Sama Seung’s response beat him to the punch.

“I don’t think it’s a bad idea. Since this will be the last conference, it should be alright to make it a grand event.”

Sama Seung held the power of the Southern Edge Sect.

Hyun Jong sighed.

If Elder Hwang had invited this crowd, and the Southern Edge sect agreed to it, it would be difficult for Mount Hua to oppose the decision. Was he going to tell those who just climbed Mount Hua to return with nothing to show for it?

‘I can’t do that.’

Word would spread that Mount Hua was too harsh to their guests. It would be even worse when considering the influence of the officials here.

‘It will be difficult.’

It would be difficult to deal with them.

In the end, Hyun Jong had to sigh and smile.

“Sure. Since you’re here, please enjoy yourselves.”

“Thanks for your understanding, Sect Leader. Well then.”

Elder Hwang smiled and turned around. The others who gathered also smiled and headed to the audience seats prepared by Elder Hwang.

Elder Hwang, who led the crowd, raised his head and looked at Chung Myung.

‘Will this be fine?’

Chung Myung nodded.

Exchanging glances, Elder Hwang was left with an awkward feeling.

‘This young disciple always surprises me. What is he going to do this time?’

It was none other than Chung Myung who requested that Elder Hwang gather the influential people of Shaanxi. Chung Myung secretly visited Elder Hwang and spoke to him in Hua-Um.

- First, I need you to gather all the famous people you can.

‘I did what I was told. I don’t know what will happen next, young disciple.’

Looking at Hwang Mun-Yak’s gaze, Chung Myung smiled.

‘The best way to taste success is with others watching!’

What’s the point of fighting each other when there’s no one around?

Even if they produced good results, no one would believe it, and the Southern Edge Sect can simply deny anything Mount Hua says. Therefore, he had to make sure that everyone could see the results with their own eyes.

“The preparations are done.”

“*Huh?* ”

“No, nothing.”

How could anyone else know what he had planned?

Anyway!

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‘My Sahyung! I’m using my head! Hurry and take back what you said about me being stupid!’

- Right, I suppose a small brain is still a brain.

“Can’t you compliment me!? How great would it be if you could praise me to my face?”

Jo Gul frowned and leered at Chung Myung.

“Why do you keep talking to yourself? Are you nervous?”

“…”

While Chung Myung sighed, the preparations were finished.

The chairs and tables were neatly arranged, the audience was seated, and the servants brought everyone refreshments too.

“It looks like it’s starting.”

Someone’s nervous voice could be heard.

Un Am walked to the middle of the training hall. Standing in the center, he looked around and clapped his hands.

Straightening his chest, he took a deep breath and loosed a solemn and hoarse voice.

“Then, let’s begin the Mount Hua-Southern Edge Sect conference.”

The atmosphere grew heated in an instant.

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“I’m excited.”

“*Haha*. Thanks to Elder Hwang, I’ll get to see such an interesting event.”

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled at the praise pouring in from the people around him.

“I have to thank you for accepting the invitation. I hope you didn’t have a hard time coming all the way out here.”

“*Hahaha*. I couldn’t afford to miss this rare opportunity.”

Blessings and cheers came and went. However, Hwang Mun-Yak didn’t ignore that many of the people here were carefully examining the situation and trying to determine who would rise to the occasion at this conference.

There was no way that the people gathered here were simply there for idle entertainment.

Their interest was in the next generation of the two factions. Among them, most were there for the Southern Edge Sect.

The merchants and sects often seemed to be close yet distant at the same time.

Considering how quickly a faction can rise or fall, everyone was sensitive to information concerning the strength of a sect. They were all hoping to invest in the next strong sect.

After all, power attracts wealth.

They are trying to estimate the future of the Southern Edge Sect by evaluating the younger generations’ performance here.

“A fight between Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect. Isn’t the opponent a bit disappointing, though?”

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“You’re right. If they were trying to display their strength, they should have called for a strong sect. Will they really be able to display their best against Mount Hua?”

The public spoke in hushed tones.

‘This would be an objective evaluation.’

Hwang Mun-Yak didn’t believe their assessments were wrong.

Mount Hua now seemed like a joke compared to its past a hundred years ago. There was a time when the Southern Edge Sect could do nothing compared to Mount Hua, which held one of the top positions among the Nine Great Sects. However, Mount Hua lost its place and collapsed, while the Southern Edge Sect grew to attain a position as one of the Ten Great Sects.

But…

Hwang Mun-Yak’s gaze fell upon the disciples of Mount Hua gathered at one side.

Hwang Mun-Yak frowned as he struggled to see Chung Myung.

‘I don’t think he’s the type to lose.’

So, is that child hiding some kind of clever trick?

Hwang Mun-Yak smiled.

‘It’s a bit unpleasant to see others rushing into Mount Hua, but Mount Hua’s reputation needs to spread for it to recover. So, this time, I cooperated with the young disciple without another thought.’

Hwang Mun-Yak’s heart swelled with anticipation at what might soon unfold.

Standing in the center, Un Am looked at both sides of the hall, where the disciples of Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect stood opposing one another and spoke. It was a bit flustering since an audience had suddenly appeared, but there was no difficulty leading it since the conference had become a tradition.

“First, the representatives of each faction’s disciples will engage each other one-on-one. Ten representatives of the second-class disciples will perform.”

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Un Am spoke resolutely.

“Initiate!”

As soon as his words ended, one person from each side stood up.

Jin Geum-Ryong and Baek Cheon.

Each of them was the leader of their sect’s second-class disciples.

“Sahyung!”

“Sahyung! Do your best!”

“You must win!”

At the cheers of his juniors, Baek Cheon took a deep breath. His hardened face could show how nervous he was.

He turned his head, gave a final glance at his juniors, and proceeded to the center of the arena. Across from him, Jin Geum-Ryong strode forward in a relaxed manner.

The two men came face-to-face with one another.

“As expected.”

Along with the Eunha Guild, there was another large figure present. The head of the Daebung Merchant Guild, Wei Zikae, smiled upon seeing Jin Geum-Ryong.

“Jin Geum-Ryong is said to be a remarkably talented disciple that will one day lead the Southern Edge Sect. He has a truly fantastic presence.”

“That’s how a young hero should be.”

Jin Geum-Ryong, donning a white robe and wielding a wooden sword in one hand, captured the crowd’s attention.

“But doesn’t the one across from him also look great?”

“When you say that, well, they seem to look alike. Like black and white, two

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contrasting sides of a painting.”

Baek Cheon, wearing a black uniform, stood tall against his foe.

”It feels like anticipation is rising in the air, but will Mount Hua’s disciple really be able to match Jin Geum-Ryong?”

“I don’t know. Mount Hua has indeed been weathering the storm for quite a while, but recently it feels like something about the sect has changed. If you think about the sect’s impressive legacy… there may be some unexpected results.”

Although that was said, no one genuinely thought Baek Cheon could defeat Jin Geum-Ryong.

The Mount Hua of today couldn’t be compared to their past glory. Hasn’t the crowd’s lack of faith been proven by how they had already severed their ties with the sect long ago? If they believed there was still any hope left for Mount Hua, they would never have burned their bridges so completely.

What the audience expected was to see how strong the Southern Edge Sect had become.

Sama Seung’s expression stiffened as he overheard the crowd’s idle banter. He understood that they were only speaking empty pleasantries to save Mount Hua’s dignity, but it left him feeling dirty.

‘Show them. Geum-Ryong.’

The reality was that Mount Hua was in no position to even be mentioned alongside the Southern Edge Sect.

Hyun Jong bit his lip and looked at Baek Cheon.

‘Show them everything you’ve got.’

So that there are no regrets.

While everyone had their own expectations and concerns, Jin Geum-Ryong and Baek Cheon faced off against each other.

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And Jin Geum-Ryong spoke first.

“You came without running away.”

Baek Cheon answered with a determined face.

“I am the Great Sahyung of Mount Hua’s second-class disciples. There’s no way that I could run.”

“Big words, coming from you.”

Jin Geum-Ryong raised his sword and pointed at Baek Cheon.

“Well, the smallest dogs are known to bark the loudest.”

“Are you going to be bitten by a dog then?”

“I made a mistake. You aren’t even a dog.”

“You…”

“Try it once. As I said yesterday, I will show you. How insignificant you truly are.”

Baek Cheon didn’t bother responding. Instead, he briefly glanced at where Hyun Jong was sitting.

‘Sect leader is watching.’

Now was the time to set aside his personal grudges and selfishness.

‘I am the second-class disciple, Baek Cheon.’

Baek Cheon locked eyes with Jin Geum-Ryong. He, too, raised his wooden sword and squared off with his opponent.

Everyone watched as tension ignited the air.

One was the representative of Mount Hua, and the other was the Southern Edge Sect's pride.

Normally, it would make sense for these two to face off against each other at the end and close the event. However, according to the conference's tradition, these two will be the ones to open the event's proceedings.

In a way, this battle would potentially determine the conference's outcome entirely on its own. How could the audience not be bursting with anticipation?

The moment someone was about to speak, Baek Cheon moved.

Paaah!

The dull sound of the floor being struck clearly reverberated.

Continuing to sprint forward, Baek Cheon attempted to stab at Jin Geum-Ryong's neck with efficient moves lacking unnecessary flair.

Swoosh!

Instead of facing the incoming blade directly, Jin Geum-Ryong deftly side-stepped and avoided the strike.

Swish!

Baek Cheon’s sword quickly pursued Jin Geum-Ryong. His wrist seemed to shake slightly, and soon an illusory sword technique was unleashed; it appeared as though dozens of strikes were being unleashed.

Mount Hua’s colorful sword arts enveloped the training hall.

“*Oh!* ”

“Amazing!”

“The children of Mount Hua seem to have great skills.”

It was a splendid technique that made the people watching admire it.

Although the sword technique was displayed through a wooden sword, its sharpness matched that of a real blade. Yet, Jin Geum-Ryong stayed facing it. It was a wonder whether there was any way to deal with this onslaught.

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The second and third-class disciples of Mount Hua could not help but clench their fists as they watched.

Jo Gul excitedly exclaimed.

“As expected of Baek Cheon sasuk! Sasuk’s Cheong Yang Fierce Tiger Sword is truly the best!”

Mount Hua’s disciples couldn’t hide their excitement.

They knew.

How much Baek Cheon had trained until his bones gave way. After being humiliated at the last conference, Baek Cheon hadn’t forgotten

the disgrace he felt as he fully devoted himself to training.

It was Baek Cheon who volunteered for the closed-door training. The person capable of living the most pleasant life on Mount Hua chose to lock himself away and focus solely on the sword.

How could the disciples not support such a man?

Baek Cheon's sword shadow splendidly pursued Jin Geum-Ryong as it keenly sliced the air. Each and every movement was sharp enough to wound. It was hard to tell what was real or fake as the illusory blade mixed in complex movements.

Hyun Jong, who carefully observed every detail, clenched his fist.

'When did that child reach such a level?'

At that level, he wasn't far behind the Un disciples. He knew Baek Cheon was talented, but this was astonishing!

The eyes of Mount Hua's martial artists were colored with hope as they proudly watched Baek Cheon's display.

Perhaps…

It might be different this time.

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Even Yoon Jong couldn't hide his shock and awe.

"Chung Myung! Sasuk is pushing him back!"

"Yes."

"Maybe we can win!"

“No way.”

“*Huh?* ”

Yoon Jong looked back at Chun Myung. Chung Myung was leaning back on his chair with a sullen face.

“If you want to win, you need to hit your enemy, but he can’t even land a single blow.”

“Still, we can win…”

“Does Sahyung’s face look like someone that’s sure of their victory?”

“*Uh?* ”

Yoon Jong turned his head and looked at Baek Cheon again. Soon, he had no choice but to harden his expression.

Baek Cheon’s face seemed to crumble as he appeared to be struggling.

‘Why!’

Baek Cheon was swinging his sword with all his might.

The first step is intensely taken at the correct angle. Qi is raised and flows through the firm lower body through to the fingertips. Eventually, his sword is brandished with qi and swung with every fiber of his being.

Lightly, and lightly.

Light as a butterfly but sharp as a knife!

However, the light, yet sharp, sword never reached Jin Geum-Ryong's body.

'Why won't it reach!? Why!?'

So far away.

The opponent standing in front of Baek Cheon seemed too far away. It was like standing in front of a cliff that pierced high into the sky.

A cliff he couldn't dare to climb or cross.

Soaked in fear and perspiration, Baek Cheon screamed, unable to even wipe the sweat on his face.

"*AAHHHH!* "

One devastating blow.

Baek Cheon's final strike displayed an illusion of several swords, all piercing at Jin Geum-Ryong.

It was then.

Kang!

Jin Geum-Ryong wielded his sword for the first time and deflected Baek Cheon's technique.

With the sword stopped, the qi covering the field disappeared. Only then could Baek Cheon clearly see Jin Geum-Ryong's face.

Unlike Baek Cheon, who was sweating and drenched in sweat, Jin Geum-Ryong had neither shed a single drop of sweat nor had any difficulty breathing. Instead, he simply observed Baek Cheon with a cheeky smile covering his face.

"Have you had your fun?"

“…You.”

“Stupid brat. No matter how hard you struggle to learn Mount Hua’s martial arts, do

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you really think you could even touch the hair on my head?”

Jin Geum-Ryong’s sword pierced Baek Cheon at an imperceptible speed.

Puak!

Baek Cheon fell to the floor with a gasp, unable to scream, as he was struck in the shoulder.

“*Kua…”*

Groaning, he forced himself to stand. When he raised his head, he saw Jin Geum-Ryong approaching him with a leisurely smile.

“You’ll soon understand with your body. Just how much of an idiot you are.”

Without mercy, Jin Geum-Ryong’s sword fell on Baek Cheon.

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The difference was known from the start.

Jin Geum-Ryong has been recognized for his talent since childhood. Among the people Baek Cheon knew, the one most suited to being called a genius was Jin Geum-Ryong.

He had already experienced defeat.

In the last conference, and even before that, Baek Cheon had never won against Jin Geum-Ryong. He was only ever left with the bitter taste of defeat.

But

‘I thought I could narrow the gap this time.’

Because he worked so hard.

Chung Myung criticized his efforts as misguided, but Baek Cheon endured a bone-cutting ordeal for that training. At least, he was confident that he trained twice as much as Jin Geum-Ryong.

He believed that even if he couldn’t win, he would have at least slightly bridged the divide between them.

But the reality was worse than he’d imagined.

Puck!

“*Kuak!* ”

Jin Geum-Ryong’s sword struck Baek Cheon’s ankle. As he staggered back, he desperately clenched his teeth to sober himself enough to regain balance.

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Baek Cheon’s ankle would have been severed if this was a real sword. Thankfully, it wasn’t a real sword but a wooden one.

But conversely, since this wasn’t a real sword, he couldn’t even accept defeat so easily.

‘Why can’t I reach you?’

‘Why!?’

‘I tried so hard!’

Puak!

Jin Geum-Ryong’s sword flew again and hit Baek Cheon’s other thigh.

The impact almost broke the bone. For a moment, Baek Cheon’s distraught mind was lost to pain, but he neither groaned nor screamed. He slapped the floor with his wooden sword and tried to attack again.

“*Euuhhhhhh!* ”

His sword aimed for Jin Geum-Ryong’s head. A simple blow, but it was fast and sharp.

“Slow.”

However, Jin Geum-Ryong took a step back and twisted his body to negate the attack.

Puck!

And Jin Geum-Ryong’s sword struck Baek Cheon’s left shoulder.

His flesh burst from the impact, and blood began to drip from the wound.

“*Kuak*.”

It would only take one more attack for Jin Geum-Ryong to perfectly finish this match.

However, he didn’t end it and stepped back instead.

He looked down at Baek Cheon with an arrogant expression.

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“*Kuaak*.”

Baek Cheon, with one hand, pressed heavily on the ground and tried to raise himself up again.

“…”

Bloodshot eyes.

Despite the pain, he glared at Jin Geum-Ryong with a fierce will.

“*Oh?* ”

Jin Geum-Ryong looked at Baek Cheon, a bit surprised.

“You’re struggling so hard just to stand, but your spirit is still alive.”

Jin Geum-Ryong raised his sword at Baek Cheon.

“But that spirit is all you have. You will remain unable to even touch the hem of my clothes for the rest of your life.”

“…why?”

“You must really lack a brain. I already told you.”

Taking a look around, Jin Geum-Ryong spoke.

“That’s how great the difference between Mount Hua and the Southern Edge Sect is.

The martial arts of Mount Hua cannot compare to the martial arts of the Southern Edge Sect. A hundred years may pass! Even if you had a thousand years! Nothing would change!”

An arrogant declaration.

But no one could refute Jin Geum-Ryong. Even the elders of Mount Hua could only listen and bite their lips, but they could not bring themselves to decry his remark.

Hyun Jong shut his eyes tightly.

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‘How long must we endure this? How far does he intend to go?’

Who could understand this situation? The elders of the sect were unable to condemn or punish a second-class disciple despite him uttering such humiliating words.

‘My disciples’

‘Forgive me.’

But Jin Geum-Ryong’s arrogance didn’t end there.

He smiled at Baek Cheon.

“If you still want to catch up to me even after this, then you’d better leave Mount Hua.

There’s no future here. The only thing left for this ruined sect is ridicule.”

Baek Cheon clenched his teeth.

“I… am a disciple of Mount Hua.”

“Well, that’s fine. Then if that’s the case…”

Jin Geum-Ryong took his sword in hand and rushed at Baek Cheon.

Baek Cheon tried to somehow defend himself, but his arm failed to respond.

Puak!

A vicious sound rang out as Baek Cheon was struck another dozen times before he collapsed.

Thud!

Jin Geum-Ryong glanced at Baek Cheon, who fell unconscious and grinned.

“I need to show you. *Ah*, my bad. It’s a little too late now.”

With a sly smirk, he retrieved his sword and stepped over the body of Baek Cheon.

Steadily walking, he returned to his group.

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Defeat.

A complete defeat.

“Sahyung!”

“Sasuk!!”

At that moment, all of Mount Hua’s disciples ran to the center of the hall.

“Sa-Sasuk!”

“D-Don’t mess with me!”

“…”

Baek Sang, who carefully held the unconscious Baek Cheon, was silent for a moment as he bowed his head. Then, he turned his head to glare with a grim expression.

“Isn’t this too much!?”

Jin Geum-Ryong, who was walking back to his sect, turned and looked at Baek Sang.

“What’s too much?”

“This is just a spar! How can you injure your opponent so harshly!?”

“Spar… isn’t that exactly why he ended up like that?”

“…what?”

Jin Geum-Ryong smiled.

“If this had been a battle with real swords, do you think he would simply be unconscious?”

“…”

“It’s because this was a spar that he’s able to stay alive. Am I wrong?”

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“How dare you…”

“Don’t get too angry.”

“…”

Jin Geum-Ryong spoke with a grin.

“Even I’m a bit flustered here. I didn’t think he would be so weak. I thought he could at least defend himself. Maybe I expected too much; I apologize.”

Baek Sang bit his lip so hard he nearly drew blood.

A perfect defeat.

And over-the-top mockery afterward.

Baek Sang wanted to drag that guy out and tear him apart if he could.

But there was nothing Baek Sang could do about it.

“Take Sahyung to the treatment hall! Right now!”

“Yes!”

The sajaes holding Baek Cheon quickly carried him away while Baek Sang pulled out his wooden sword.

“Let’s see what this Southern Edge bastard’s sword is worth!”

“There’s no need to refuse. Seo-Han.”

“Yes! Sahyung!”

“Face him!”

“Yes!”

Jong Seo-Han entered the arena with a grin.

Seeing him walk so leisurely, Baek Sang tightly grasped his sword.

Contrary to the oppressive atmosphere forming between the disciples, the audience was enthused and deeply interested.

“So astonishing.”

“Baek Cheon was stronger than I thought, but Jin Geum-Ryong’s achievements exceed my expectations.”

“He is truly a man worthy of the praise he’s received. With such a fine disciple, wouldn’t the Southern Edge Sect be eligible to compete with the top sects?”

“I know. *Hahaha*.”

Hwang Mun-Yak’s expression went stiff.

‘This is why they are merchants.’

A man was being carried away in a miserable condition, but no one paid any attention to that.

The crowd was only interested in Jin Geum-Ryong, and how they could grasp onto the Southern Edge Sect in order to grow their wealth.

Hwang Mun-Yak isn't much different from them, but he couldn't hide his disgust at their actions in such moments.

'This is a disastrous defeat.'

Baek Cheon and Jin Geum-Ryong.

Even if the representatives of two sects faced off, such a one-sided defeat was normally not possible. Mount Hua's momentum would halt with such embarrassing results, and morale would sink.

Until the end, Baek Cheon never managed to land a single blow on Jin Geum-Ryong.

If the conference continued like this, Mount Hua would never be able to regain its past glory.

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No, most likely, the sect's downfall would accelerate. Because no one would be willing to acknowledge them.

No matter how heavily Hwang Mun-Yak supported them, reviving the sect would be impossible. This would be a death sentence.

' *Ugh.* What the hell are you thinking?'

He thought that Chung Myung would have some plan, so he gathered the most influential people he could. But this was starting to go horribly wrong.

'Was I overestimating the young disciple?'

Hwang Mun-Yak looked at Chung Myung.

“…is Sasuk fine?”

“There’s no way he’s fine.”

“Is he seriously hurt?”

“Badly.”

“…”

Chung Myung’s dispassionate response evoked a serious and angered reaction from Yoon Jong.

“No matter how bad our relationship is, that man is still our Sasuk! Are you seriously fine with our senior receiving such horrible treatment!?”

“Calm down, Sahyung.”

“You bastard!”

“I told you to calm down.”

Yoon Jong was shaken at how calm Chung Myung was. This was different from Chung Myung’s usual nature.

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“You never thought he could win?”

“…”

Yoon Jong bit his lip.

He didn’t expect Sasuk to win. But… just the bare minimum at least. Baek Cheon was someone that carried the expectations of everyone in Mount Hua.

Perhaps the reason Yoon Jong was angry now wasn’t because of Baek Cheon’s injuries but because of his horrible defeat.

‘Is the gap between the Southern Edge Sect and us this big?’

The Ten Great Sects. The Ten Great Sects are incredibly powerful. But the disciples of Mount Hua never cared much about it. Probably because Mount Hua once belonged to that same group.

Although the sect had fallen, Yoon Jong believed that they could one day compete amongst the Ten Great Sects again with enough effort and luck.

However, it seemed like those sects were much stronger than he imagined.

Chung Myung smiled bitterly.

“If everything could be solved by effort alone, then everyone in this world could become a master. What matters isn’t how hard we try; it’s about how you apply your effort.”

“…”

“Watch. Take a good look from now. All the second-class disciples will lose.”

“All of them?”

“There is not even one here who can defeat them. No, there is one, but I don’t think that person will fight.”

Yoon Jong’s face went stiff.

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In the last conference, there were two draws and eight losses.

That itself was a disaster, and this time where won't even be a draw?

"…if we lose like this…"

It'll be miserable.

But Chung Myung stared at Yoon Jong with wide eyes.

"Lose? Who's going to lose?"

"What? You just said…"

"That's just the second-class disciples!"

"…"

Chung Myung blinked his eyes.

"Who's going to let those Southern Edge bastards return from Mount Hua with a victory? Who will let them!? As long as my two eyes are open, I will never see that happen! Even if my eyes get dirt in them, I refuse to see that sight!"

"…"

"So, relax your body. Maybe we should try and do something flashy."

"No, the—"

It was then.

"*Aacccck*!"

Yoon Jong quickly turned his head only for the sight of Baek Sang, lying brutally beaten on the floor, to flood his vision.

Jong Seo-Han kicked the fallen man while he was down.

“Think you can still put up a fight?”

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“*Uh*…”

“It seems you’re all talk.”

Jong Seo-Han looked at Baek Sang and then at the disciples of Mount Hua. Then he made an arrogant gesture as if looking down on them.

Chung Myung’s mouth opened.

“No, but that bastard, what’s with him?”

“Catch him again!”

The third-class disciples rushed in and grabbed Chung Myung, who was ready to charge in.

Seeing that, Jong Seo-Han was dumbfounded and laughed.

“I get to see all kinds of things here. Well, you are just an unknown sect, so it’s understandable.”

“*Oh?* ”

Chung Myung’s eyes widened.

“Let’s see how long you can keep smiling!”

‘You were the one who called for me!’

‘Now it’s too late to regret it!’

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“…Sect leader.”

Hyun Jong just closed his eyes without saying anything.

“…Shouldn’t we stop this?”

Hyun Sang spoke with a trembling voice. But Hyun Jong couldn’t answer him.

Stop?

How does one stop this?

They were in the presence of so many influential leaders.

‘We can’t handle the Southern Edge Sect. If we continue, the children will only get injured, so it might be better to end this now.’

Was that what he should say?

That would be a complete disgrace to Mount Hua’s name.

Even if Mount Hua was on the verge of collapse… no, since they were on the verge of collapse, they have something they must absolutely protect. Their name and their pride.

If they were unable to safeguard their pride and the reputation of their name, then Mount Hua would no longer be a top-class sect facing ruination. They would truly become a third-rate sect undeserving of respect.

That would be the moment that Mount Hua truly collapses.

Hyun Jong couldn’t allow that. Not for the sake of his own honor but to protect the possibility that Mount Hua could someday be revived. So, as the sect leader, he could

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only remain silent in this situation.

However, the circumstances were so bad that even Hyun Sang, who understood Hyun Jong’s plight, couldn’t help but speak out.

Consecutive losses.

Nine times in a row.

They had already achieved the worst outcome of any conference yet. But the biggest issue wasn’t about winning or losing, but the content of the battles.

Nine disciples went forward, and not a single one of them could even touch their opponent. It was like watching a child challenge an adult. No, maybe that would be less tragic than this.

All the important leaders of Shaanxi were watching.

‘How can we handle this disgrace?’

Hyun Jong’s eyes trembled.

It felt like his five viscera were being torn apart inside his body. It wasn't the humiliation that bothered him; it was the despair his disciples were experiencing.

Unable to gauge the strength of their opponent, they pushed these children into this hopeless battle. Thinking of the emotional impact this would have on the children, who suffered because of the incompetent elders, the sect leader wanted to chop himself to pieces.

"Sect leader…"

Hyun Jong opened his eyes as he let out a sigh.

"…this is saddening."

"But…"

"Aren't you upset with me?"

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It was then.

"*kuak!* "

The last of the second-class disciples fell to the floor as his sword fell from his hand.

For a swordsman to lose their sword is a greater disgrace than death. The Southern Edge Sect's disciple was so skillful that they only aimed for the wrist until they achieved their desired results.

"I don't understand how a swordsman could let go of his sword. Doesn't Mount Hua teach you what that means?"

Mockery.

Even with such insulting ridicule, no one could speak out.

Ten consecutive losses.

There was no result more disastrous than this. The faces of Mount Hua's elders were horribly contorted.

'Did it have to turn out like this?'

They thought they had finally gotten the opportunity to resurrect Mount Hua. Good things had constantly been happening lately.

But they were too immersed in their dreams; they forgot how cruel reality was. In the end, Mount Hua is a martial sect. Any luxury was meaningless if it wasn't supported by strength.

Everyone there became keenly aware of this harsh fact.

"Well done!"

"Yes, elder!"

Sama Seung patted Ark Ho on the shoulders.

The result was satisfactory.

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Not only did everyone win, but every battle was entirely one-sided. The most encouraging aspect was that this was accomplished in full view of Shaanxi's officials.

'Now Mount Hua's fame will fall to the ground and never rise again.'

Hadn’t they dreamed of this situation countless times over the past few generations?

Sama Seung felt honored that he would be present to witness the sect’s long-cherished desire be fulfilled.

Perhaps by now, the audience understood the situation.

Unsurprisingly, murmured gossip could be heard.

“This is too one-sided.”

“Still, I had some expectations for Mount Hua… it seems that the past is the past, and the present is the present. Mount Hua can no longer be thought of as it was in the past.”

“Didn’t we already know that?”

“Still, this is too miserable… in fact, I really can’t tell if the Southern Edge Sect is strong or if Mount Hua is just too weak.”

“Isn’t it both?”

“A pity. So unfortunate. It seems like Mount Hua is really finished. All in vain…”

Sama Seung smiled as he heard it.

Public opinion had shifted towards the Southern Edge Sect. However, Sama Seung’s purpose here wasn’t to elevate the name of his sect; his goal was to send Mount Hua plummeting into the abyss.

To do that, even the sprouts needed to be burned to the ground.

“Now, it is time to end this. Did you see what your seniors did?”

“Yes, elder!”

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The third-class disciples of the Southern Edge Sect looked determined.

“Do not hesitate.”

Sama Seung’s eyes shone.

“A lion does its best even when hunting a rabbit. Do not show mercy. You need to destroy them so horribly that they never think of learning martial arts again.”

“Yes! I will keep it in mind!”

Sama Seung looked up at the sky with a sly grin.

‘Such a clear day.’

And such a good day too.

“…”

Yoon Jong was at a loss for words.

He couldn’t bear to look at the second-class disciples gathered on the side. Even without seeing their expressions, he could tell how much despair they were drowning in.

And it was the same for the third-class disciples.

‘The difference between our sects is this big?’

The conferences held until now also ended in defeat, but it was never like this. It was never so one-sided. This conference gave off the feeling of a man casually stepping on a gathering of ants.

That was when they realized that Mount Hua had never dealt with the true Southern Edge Sect.

"…is it our turn?"

"…"

The faces of the third-class disciples darkened.

It was true that they trained under Chung Myung, but the gap in abilities that they witnessed completely crushed their confidence.

No, everyone has probably given up…

That wasn't even the main problem…

Yoon Jong looked at Chung Myung, who was sitting next to him.

And *gasp!* He held his breath.

Crack!

The sound of teeth gnashing made his heart sink. Chung Myung's face was boiling red like it would explode.

"…"

Every time one of the seniors was defeated, Chung Myung's face would turn a slightly deeper shade of red; he now looked like a red plum.

Seeing Chung Myung's face, Yoon Jong grabbed the hem of his uniform.

‘This bastard is going to lose control soon.’

Three years in the temple, and one becomes good at reciting scripture. Three months next to Chung Myung, and one will become a master of reading the room!

Yoon Jong spoke with a trembling voice.

“Chu—Chung Myung, let’s calm down.”

“…calm down?”

When Yoon Jong heard Chung Myung’s crooked voice, he felt his heart sink… no, he couldn’t give up! This was a conference between two sects! Not just the sect leader, but the people of the Southern Edge Sect and Shaanxi are watching!

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If this guy had lost control, something even worse than the second-class disciples losing would happen.

Yoon Jong began to look at Chung Myung as if trying to soothe a rabid dog.

“Ch–Chung Myung. Think carefully. Remember what you said yesterday. In order for a person to accomplish great things, patience is the most important thing!”

“…patience.”

“Right! Patience!”

“…Sahyung.”

“Yes, Chung Myung. I remember those words well…”

“I’ve been thinking.”

“About?”

Chung Myung turned his head slowly, very slowly, to the side and matched Yoon Jong’s gaze.

And

Yoon Jong saw him.

Chung Myung’s eyes were half out of control.

“…I.”

Chung Myung growled like an animal and stood up.

“Don’t have any sense of patience in me!”

That isn’t something to be proud of.

You bastard!

Un Am took a deep breath. His face was pale, no longer able to handle this. He

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wanted to walk out and leave. But, unless the sect leader instructed him, he couldn’t stop.

“Next… we will hold the exchange of the third-class disciples. Of them—”

It was then.

“Catch him! Don’t ever let go of him!”

“Chung Myung! You’re supposed to go last!”

“People are watching! People are watching! Please! Don’t do this!”

Un Am was bewildered as he looked at the third-class disciples.

It seemed like they were united in trying to block someone as that person continued to push forward with glistening eyes.

‘Chung Myung?’

What’s wrong with that kid?

Un Am had his doubts, but he had to finish his speech. This was his role, and there were many people watching.

“So, the vanguard is—”

“*Kuaaaak!* ”

But Un Am’s words were cut off once again.

As soon as he tried to announce the competitors, Chung Myung escaped from his sahyungs’ clutches and jumped forward.

“*Phew*.”

Chung Myung stepped into the arena and took a deep breath. Then he looked to the Southern Edge Sect’s side and spoke.

“One of you, quickly get up here!”

“…”

“Anyone works. Come up quick.”

Sama Seung spoke.

“…that crazy bastard!”

He knew that this child was crazy, but this was a whole different level. Not just the Southern Edge Sect, but he even dared to speak such arrogant words in the presence of Shaanxi’s officials!

“Elder, calm down.”

Jin Geum-Ryong quickly stopped Sama Seung from losing his composure.

“We can’t run around and fall into his pace. He’ll be in pain soon enough.”

“*Hmmm!*”

Seeing that Sama Seung was still greatly displeased, Jin Geum-Ryong coughed and called out.

“Woo-Ryang!”

“Yes, Sasuk!”

Seon Woo-Ryang, the disciple chosen to deal with Chung Myung, resolutely nodded his head.

“The schedule has changed, but it doesn’t make any difference for us. Complete your role.”

“Yes! Sasuk! Don’t worry!”

Seon Woo-Ryang grabbed his wooden sword and quickly arrived in front of Chung Myung.

Then, he aimed his sword at Chung Myung.

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“I will crush that arrogant mouth of yours. I’m Southern Edge Sect’s…”

Instantly, Chung Myung disappeared from where he stood and manifested in front of his foe.

“Seon—”

He saw it.

A furious Asura-like visage appeared in front of him. The figure seemed like it was coated in darkness.

Darkness?

In broad daylight…

Ah, it wasn’t dark; something covered his sight. Since it was right in front of him, this…

‘Is a fist?’

At that moment.

Unlike anything the crowd had heard since entering Mount Hua, an explosive sound echoed throughout the hall.

Paaaaakkkkkkkk!

It rotates!

Seon Woo-Ryang's body spun through the air more than a dozen times before falling to the ground.

"…"

Seon Woo-Ryang's body, which was plastered to the floor, convulsed pitifully as if he had some medical condition.

Seeing his collapsed enemy, Chung Myung spoke as if dumbfounded.

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"I'm not joking around."

I am going to make you all beg for death.

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A roaring sound that nobody could have heard in their lives.

The audience gathered at Mount Hua discovered that the collision between a human's fist and another's face could create such a violent sound.

And rotate.

Seon Woo-Ryong, who was hit, rotated in the air and…

Swisssh!

Blood poured from his nose like a waterfall as his body spun through the sky.

‘Maybe I can try for a rainbow?’

A rainbow made from blood.

Was there anything more horrifying than that?

It felt like the line between common sense, and nonsense was breaking apart.

Seon Woo-Ryang, who spun like a bloody windmill, fell to the floor and convulsed.

Looking at the young disciple’s state, Chung Myung’s voice rang clearly in their ears.

“I’m not joking around.”

Chung Myung spat on the floor and pulled out the wooden sword around his waist.

“Get up, you son of a bitch. I’m not finished yet. My anger doesn’t die with one hit!”

Chung Myung was roaring like a lion, but it was far from regal…

‘Such dirty and petty words.’

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These were Yoon Jong’s honest feelings.

“What…?”

Sama Seung’s beard trembled.

‘W-what is this… ’

It happened in front of his eyes, but he couldn’t understand what had happened.

Chung Myung seemed to disappear for a moment and then reappeared in front of his disciple before delivering a blow. The disciple flew into the air, spun around, and then collapsed.

That was what Sama Seung saw.

The problem was that he seemed to disappear.

‘Did I miss that kid’s movement?’

Even though he didn’t care about the third-class disciples’ battles, did it make sense for an elder to miss the movement of such a young disciple?

‘No, No. It can’t be!’

Sama Seung denied what he saw. But this wasn’t his fault. Even if someone other than Sama Seung stood here, they would have reacted the same.

Anyone would surely deny a situation that went so far outside the bounds of common sense.

“You cowardly bastard!”

It was then, an angry voice came from the side of Sama Seung.

“Making a surprise attack when he was speaking! Mount Hua must not have any shame!”

“You wicked bastard!”

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“…”

That was how it seemed to the children.

Well, that’s to be expected.

The higher level the opponent, the more significant it is. For the second-class disciples, it wasn’t surprising that they lost sight of Chung Myung’s movements for a few moments.

But for Sama Seung, it was different. He was the elder of the Southern Edge Sect.

Sama Seung calmed his startled heart and concentrated again.

“Seon Woo-Ryang. Get up!”

“Get up! Woo-Ryang!”

The sound of his disciples cheering for Seon Woo-Ryang could be heard. Sama Seung stared at the fallen child with his eyes still wide in shock.

‘I must be mistaken.’

It had to be.

No, it was undoubtedly a mistake.

“Wake up, brat. I didn’t even use qi, don’t be such a crybaby!”

Chung Myung looked at Seon Woo-Ryang with blazing eyes.

The disciples from the Southern Edge sect were cursing him, but Chung Myung never made a point to listen for barking dogs.

The moment one steps onto the center of the arena, the fight begins. Why should he waste his time on courtesy by letting his opponent say whatever they wanted? If he gets sent to war, is he supposed to shake hands with his enemies, share a few drinks, and then start fighting?

"*Kua… akk…"*

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Seon Woo-Ryang staggered and got up.

Although he was struck suddenly, it was a fist that lacked internal qi. So, he wouldn't lose consciousness despite the pain.

What if Chung Myung had used internal qi?

Death! There was no need to ask!

Watching him rise, Chung Myung tapped himself on the shoulder with his wooden sword and observed his enemy.

"Get up quickly. Don't waste my time… are you okay?"

Chung Myung's voice, which had sounded annoyed and irritated, quickly softened.

"*Uhh…"*

Drip!

Pour!

This was because Seon Woo-Ryang's nose was a waterfall of blood gushing nonstop.

So much blood was flowing that the front of Seon Woo-Ryang's clothes was dripping wet, as a pool of blood collected at his feet. Even Chung Myung flinched at that sight.

Seon Woo-Ryang staggered to stand up and spoke through painful gasps.

"I-I can still fight…"

"But you'll die?"

No, it seemed like he was really going to die.

Does a broken nose usually bleed that much? It didn't seem like he had been struck with just a fist. Chung Myung would have to punch someone in the face without qi again to test and find out.

Seon Woo-Ryang supported himself with trembling legs and covered his nose with

both hands.

"The b-blood isn't stopping…"

"You're going to die! You brat!"

He would seriously die!

'No, I'm not afraid of killing people, but it shouldn't be like this!'

The first murder in Chung Myung's new life was going to be from excessive blood loss after breaking a child's nose with a single punch. What bullshit!

Chung Myung, who had such thoughts, looked at Un Am.

"Shouldn't he get some treatment?"

It would turn into a murder on Mount Hua!

"T-that, well, it's the rules. *Um…"*

Un Am was so flustered at this unexpected situation that he couldn't even speak properly. In this case, there was no ruling on whether one could return to the battle after receiving treatment. In such situations, maybe he had to ask both sides for their understanding? But was the situation right now really calm enough for him to ask both sides?

Pour!

At that moment, Seon Woo-Ryang tore off the hem of his clothes and started to stuff it into his nose.

Stopping the blood?

Smart.

The hem of the shirt was stained in blood instantly, but as he continued to stuff his nose, he somehow managed to stop the blood from flowing further. Seon Woo-Ryang, who managed to control his blood loss, raised his sword at Chung Mung.

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' *Ohhh*! Is he going to continue?'

He knew that the Southern Edge bastards don't give up easily. Such a unique bunch, Chung Myung felt oddly proud of their tenacious culture…

"You cowardly bastard!"

"… *Huh?* "

Chung Myung tilted his head.

"I'm ashamed… *cough!* Shame on you! What… *gurgle*… You did… wrong!"

'Just focus on one thing at a time. If you're going to be angry, then be angry; if you're hurt, go get treatment.'

"I'll tear you apart and feed you to the dogs!"

Chung Myung frowned.

For now, he was going to erase the compliments he had given them from his memory.

"Is cursing at others the only thing you Southern Edge disciples learn? Maybe you just lack the wisdom to understand."

- Are you really saying that?

Ah, seriously! Don't come out whenever you want, Sahyung! What do I do with the current level that Mount Hua is in? I need to raise it!

Chung Myung clenched his sword and shook his head.

"I felt a little sorry for you, but that goodwill is all gone now. Just keep your mouth shut—"

"Even if you kowtow, bang your head on the ground, and beg, it's too late! You son of a bitch! I'll crush you so badly that your parents

won’t even recognize you.”

“*Ah*, you’re going to keep talking. Well, whatever.”

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The last shred of sympathy that he felt vanished.

Chung Myung raised his sword and aimed it at Seon Woo-Ryang.

“Come.”

“…you fucker!”

“Come, I’ll show you what it’s like to be unable to even touch your enemy.”

“Come, right now!”

It was then!

“Seon Woo-Ryang!”

A sharp voice burst from behind. Seon Woo-Ryang turned his head but flinched when he saw Jin Geum-Ryong’s expression.

“Don’t get excited and remain alert. Don’t underestimate your opponent.”

Seon Woo-Ryang looked back at Chung Myung.

All the second-class disciples had overwhelmed their opponents without being hit even once. But Seon Woo-Ryang was too excited when he acted; he went up and immediately got humiliated.

He grew up hearing lectures about how overexcited people cannot show their true abilities, but he forgot those lessons when he needed them the most.

He took a deep breath and regained control of his mind. He felt uncomfortable that he couldn't breathe through his nose but was able to re-compose himself.

After getting his breathing under control, his heated gaze seemed to change into a frigid glare as he looked at Chung Myung.

"I will send you to hell!"

"…Yes, I'm sure you will."

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'Let's believe that. I don't really know what I did to his nose either, but he can try whatever he wants.'

"I will show you that the disciples of Mount Hua will never be a match for the Southern Edge Sect. You should be prepared. Do not expect mercy."

"Sure, sure, anything else? If you are done, then hurry up. Show me that I really can't touch you."

"You won't even be able to touch me!"

"Didn't I already hit you?"

'Doesn't his nose hurt?'

"I'll kill you! You bastard!"

Seon Woo-Ryang swung his wooden sword and rushed at Chung Myung.

As if he regained his composure, the tip of his sword moved sharply. Surely, Seon Woo-Ryang deserved his title as the strongest third-class disciple in the Southern Edge Sect.

Dealing with him wouldn't be easy; even Mount Hua's second-class disciples would suffer at his hands. That's not to even mention the third-class disciples.

But it was too bad for Seon Woo-Ryang; he had the worst possible opponent.

His enemy was the catastrophe of Mount Hua, Chung Myung.

"No!"

Chung Myung pulled his wooden sword back and ran at full speed at the opponent.

"*Huh?* "

Chung Myung's sword, which was pulled back, swung like lightning as it crashed onto Seon Woo-Ryang's head.

Paaaaakkkkk!

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It was unavoidable.

How can anyone avoid an invisible sword?

Seon Woo-Ryang's mouth fell open as his eyes rolled back.

‘I am dead.’

‘ *Ehh*. He might die.’

‘That child is dead.’

Seon Woo-Ryang’s body crumpled down. However, Chung Myung had no intention of stopping.

“Kids these!”

Paaak!

One more hit to the fallen.

“Days don’t!”

Paaak!

Once more!

“Have manners! No manners!”

Seon Woo-Ryang’s body fell to the floor, and Chung Myung constantly hit him.

“Even I wasn’t like that back in my day!”

If the departed up in heaven had heard that lie, they would have thrown something down to catch this liar.

Sadly, those in the other world couldn’t interfere with those still living.

“You!”

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Paaang!

Finally, Chung Myung kicked Seon Woo-Ryang in the crotch and turned away.

Seon Woo-Ryang, who soared in the air once again, fell to the floor.

Thud!

And Chung Myung clicked his tongue.

“If you didn’t curse at me, I would have been gentle with you. But kids these days, no manners!”

Hearing that, all the third-class disciples decided to never swear in front of Chung Myung.

“*Ah*, right.”

Chung Myung turned back again and approached Seon Woo-Ryang, who was convulsing.

He then grabbed the robe that Seon Woo-Ryang used to cover his nose and pulled it out.

The blood which had stopped began to flow again.

“*Ugh*, you couldn’t even stop this?”

Chung Myung looked at the Southern Edge Sect’s side.

Neither Sama Seung nor Jin Geum-Ryong nor anyone else could shut their wide-open mouths. They simply stared at Chung Myung with shock and astonishment.

“Surprised.”

He hadn’t even started yet, and they were already this surprised.

Chung Myung glanced at them and returned to his side.

Looking at his back, Sama Seung said,

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“What the hell was that…”

But no one there knew that this was just the beginning.

Except for Chung Myung.

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“…”

Hyun Young had a blank expression as he tilted his head.

‘How did this just happen?’

He was Mount Hua’s head of finance.

Since he was so quick at calculating and sensitive to profit and losses, he has evaluated potential talents whenever they entered the sect. However, the current condition of the sect made it impossible for him to concentrate on his martial arts.

Thanks to that, he became the weakest of the elders.

Because of this, it was difficult for Hyun Young to understand the scene that just unfolded in front of him.

Chung Myung defeated the disciple of the Southern Edge Sect overwhelmingly.

What was going on?

“No, sect leader…”

Hyun Young, who wanted to listen to the sect leader’s explanation, turned his head and flinched.

Hyun Jong had an expression that Hyun Young hadn’t seen on his face in decades.

His eyes were wide open as if they’d fall out, with his mouth hanging low enough for a bird to fly in. Both Hyun Jong and Hyun Sang were the same.

‘Should I also be surprised?’

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He felt a bit upset that he couldn’t understand their reactions…

“*Uh*…”

“*Huh?* ”

“*Hm*…”

“*Hm?* ”

Hyun Jong’s eyes trembled as a small voice leaked from his throat as though his soul had been stolen away.

“Th-this… can’t… this can’t… be…”

A series of mesmerized murmurs were uttered over and over. Hyun Young gently pulled on his sleeve.

“Sect leader. People are watching. Get yourself together.”

Hyun Jong quickly shut his mouth. He was so shocked that he couldn’t stop his teeth from clattering.

“No, that child…”

Hyun Jong managed to calm his expression, but he couldn’t repress his surging mind.

He raised his trembling hand and pointed to Chung Myung.

“He-He shouldn’t be like that… this… this makes no sense. We should have lost.”

In the end, Hyun Young got annoyed.

“What sort of abuse is that? After that child fought so valiantly, how could the sect leader say such a disgusting thing about their own disciple!?”

“…but this makes no sense. It makes no sense.”

Hyun Sang raised his hand and rubbed his face violently, and with his frozen expression, he asked.

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“How long has that child been in our sect?”

“Less than six months.”

“You mean that he beat a disciple of the Southern Edge Sect after six months? And it was completely one-sided as well?”

“…”

Ah…

Thinking like that made no sense.

“Un Geom! Where's Un Geom?”

“I’m here, sect leader.”

Unlike the others, Un Geom seemed relatively calm.

“Before that child entered Mount Hua, did he learn any other martial arts?”

“No. Chung Myung showed no signs of learning anything before joining.”

“Then, in just six months, he grew this much?”

“Yes.”

Hyun Jong looked at Un Geom in disbelief.

“A genius…”

Un Geom spoke as if it wasn’t a huge deal.

“I’m not sure if ‘genius’ suits that child. He’s a child that doesn’t reveal his true self.

Even I haven’t been able to fully understand his actions.”

“*Huh.* ”

When Hyun Jong burst out in admiration, Hyun Sang mumbled.

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“I thought geniuses and divine dragons only ever fell into other people’s sects, this is… like we were searching for a sack of rice in the warehouse, but a golden calf jumped out instead.”

Hyun Jong was shocked.

“I thought he was just a wealth bringer, but…”

His mumbling represented the feeling of everyone who was watching.

How much has Chung Myung done for Mount Hua already? He didn’t need to have any martial arts talent at all. Chung Myung is only human; it wouldn’t be appropriate to get greedy and try to force unrealistic expectations onto a child that’s done so much for them.

But didn’t this situation show that he had an outstanding talent as well? Enough to take down a disciple from the Southern Edge so easily?

When everyone was shocked, Hyun Young quickly moved.

“Anyway, we got the win. Doesn’t this save our face?”

“…”

“…”

Hyun Jong and Hyun Sang dumbfoundedly turned their heads. Hyun Young grew angry and felt that the elders were acting absurd.

Coughing, he spoke and tried to clear the awkward atmosphere.

“For now, he’s saved our face. For now.”

“Seriously…”

“This is why the finance head should properly learn martial arts. You are the only one who can speak so casually in this absurd situation.”

Hyun Sang joked with Hyun Young, who felt it was an unfair assessment.

Hyun Jong lightly smiled and looked away toward Chung Myung.

‘Saved our face.’

Could it be said so simply?

‘Perhaps… ’

The outcome of today’s conference may not matter at all. It was possible that Mount Hua had just acquired a talent that could carry the sect for the next 100 years.

“…Mount Hua’s child seems to have won.”

“*Um*, looks like it. But…”

“…wasn’t that too one-sided?”

“*Oh*, this was quite unexpected.”

Hwang Mun-Yak was relaxed as he enjoyed listening to the reactions around him.

‘Of course, he should act out like that!’

Hwang Mun-Yak didn’t know how strong Chung Myung was. He wasn’t even conscious when the Eunha Guild events were settled by that child.

He had been told that a single hit from Lee Song-Baek was enough for Chung Myung to cough up blood, but he didn’t believe it. He couldn’t believe it; that child was too insidious. He must have been playing the victim to capture the culprit.

For Hwang Mun-Yak, Chung Myung was an unknown element. However, the reason he could watch and remain relaxed was that…

‘There’s no way that young brat would underestimate his opponent and entertain a loss.’

It wasn’t like he knew Chung Myung very well, but he was the man whose eye for appraisal built the Eunha Guild up to its current level. In his eyes, Chung Myung stepped ahead with confidence, which meant he was strong enough to ensure victory.

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Of course, this was a more radical result than what Hwang Mun-Yak expected.

‘Right. This isn’t a lost cause; that much is clear.’

‘Is this conference a battleground for Chung Myung? Then, the results may be different from what everyone expects.’

“There are talents in Mount Hua too.”

“Considering the age, it’s a great display. No, no, great wouldn’t be enough to suffice.”

“The Southern Edge Sect’s disciples can’t be defeated with luck alone, and that was the best of the third-class disciples. Wasn’t there a big difference between them too?”

“To take the lead so confidently, that child was surely an outstanding talent from the Southern Edge Sect, but it was completely one-sided.”

The conversation between the merchants and officials sounded like a melodious song to Hwang Mun-Yak.

However, Hwang Mun-Yak didn’t miss these voices’ extraordinary heat. It was hard to hear praises for the Southern Edge Sect anymore, but there was also no one there who hadn’t set their sights on Chung Myung.

‘Don’t even dream about it! He is the fish I caught.’

With one hit, Chung Myung managed to get more attention than Jin Geum-Ryong. No, no matter how this conference of sects ended, the name of Chung Myung would now spread throughout Shaanxi.

Hwang Mun-Yak glanced at Chung Myung, who returned to his seat with a smile.

“But they only won once. If all the other disciples lose, then it will just mean that he’s the only outstanding one there.”

“That could be true.”

Hwang Mun-Yak narrowed his eyes and looked at the third-class disciples that welcomed Chung Myung.

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‘Now, show me. Chung Myung, show them all!’

Indeed.

Will it end with one outstanding win?

Or will Mount Hua be able to counterattack?

Chung Myung sat down with a smug expression as the sunlight fell on him.

The burning irritation which colored his expression had vanished, and in its place was a relaxed face that seemed to have no concerns.

‘How can he be so happy after beating someone up like that?’

‘Even the devil wouldn’t look so relieved!’

Although the disciples had these thoughts, they felt oddly gratified and burst out.

“Chung Myung! You did well!”

“Shouldn’t you have stepped on him a bit more?”

“He must have lost ten years of his life!”

Seeing the sajaes cheer, Yoon Jong smiled.

‘I guess they are all true masters.’

They would have decried such actions if they had experienced a similar situation before Chung Mung arrived. Such as whether they needed to go so far or how could a disciple of Mount Hua be so vicious; they would have spoken innocent words like that.

But now that they had been tainted in Chung Myung’s color, they cheered as if they were staging a festival.

Even Yoon Jong couldn’t help but smile as he spoke.

“Chung Myung, you did well.”

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“Well, I just had a little fun.”

It was a bad thing to say, but at this moment, it seemed justified and made the other disciples feel relieved.

‘I knew he was strong, but… ’

They didn’t expect Chung Myung to be able to utterly sweep through a disciple of the Southern Edge Sect.

This would be enough to shake their confidence. Mount Hua’s disciples felt pity for the Southern Edge Sect for the first time.

Mount Hua was always in a position of receiving pity from others and was never able to sympathize with others.

Yoon Jong deeply realized that he could feel pity for all mankind by becoming entangled with Chung Myung.

“Chung Myung, great job!”

“That was amazing, really!”

Even if their relationship with Chung Myung was rather strained, the second-class disciples still flocked towards him and cheered.

It wasn’t the third-class disciples or the elders, but the second-class disciples who were the happiest with Chung Myung’s results. He had helped them repay the disgrace they suffered.

The defeat was one thing, but the ridicule and insults that the Southern Edge Sect had directed towards them were unacceptable. Chung Myung beating his opponent was like a refreshing bucket of cold water pouring down on a blazing summer day.

Despite their previous grievances, Chung Myung even began to look a bit cute to these seniors.

Personal feelings shouldn't be included, but they were still happy that Chung Myung had managed to regain a bit of Mount Hua's honor after being damaged in the matches so far.

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'So cheeky.'

'If he has such skills, he can act however cheeky he wants!'

'Maybe he's a good child after all.'

Chung Myung shrugged his shoulders as he received everyone's praises and looked at Yoon Jong.

"Sahyung!"

It was a firm voice. Yoon Jong, who guessed its meaning, nodded with a firm expression.

'It's my turn.'

Chung Myung accomplished his role… no, he overdid it. Now, Yoon Jong and the others should carry the flame.

Determined…

"What are you looking at so stupidly? Get out there."

“…”

No, does this bastard have to send someone off like that?

“…Yes.”

Still, there was something Yoon Jong needed to ask.

“Do you have any advice? Some tips or knowledge about their martial arts?”

“Would you be able to use it even if you knew?”

“…”

“Just get out there. If you can see their face, you can slap it.”

“…I know.”

With bewildered eyes, Yoon Jong walked to the center of the arena. Looking at the eyes around him, his expression changed.

‘The atmosphere definitely changed.’

Mount Hua didn’t have any presence before. But thanks to Chung Myung, the mood changed.

There were expectations that the third-class disciples might be different.

It was Yoon Jong’s job to turn the audience’s expectations into a reality.

“*Phew*.”

He didn’t want to be nervous, but he couldn’t help it. Maybe it was because he didn’t expect so many eyes on him or because of Chung Myung’s performance.

But if Yoon Jong loses…

It was then.

“Sayung.”

Chung Myung called him from behind, and Yoon Jong looked back with a stiff face.

‘Right, any bastard with a conscience would offer some kind of encouragement.’

“If you lose, I’m going to kill you.”

“…”

‘ *Ah*, I forgot for a moment that he’s Chung Myung.’

‘It was my fault. My fault.’

Taking a deep breath, Yoon Jong’s stiff face hardened again. He drew his sword, took his stance, and boldly stared at the disciples of the Southern Edge Sect.

Aiming his sword, he spoke.

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“Yoon Jong, third-class disciple of Mount Hua, asks for an opponent from the Southern Edge Sect!”

The winds of change began to blow towards Mount Hua.

PDF by: traitorAFZEN

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